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James Lencx.







THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD.

L. AND J. SEELEY, WESTON GREEN, THAMES DITTON, SURREY.



THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD;

AS THEY MAY BE CONTEMPLATED BY THE
CHRISTIAN FOR EDIFICATION, PEACE,
AND CONSOLATION :

SELECTED FROM

CHARNOCK, GOODWIN, BATES,
AND WISHEART :

BY THE REV. W. WILSON, D. D.

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CONTENTS.

SELECTIONS FROM CHARNOCK.

	PAGE.
I. The Spirituality of God, . . .	1
II. The Eternity of God, . . .	22
III. The Immutability of God, . . .	31
IV. The Omnipresence of God, . . .	35
V. The Knowledge of God, . . .	46
VI. The Wisdom of God, . . .	62
VII. The Power of God, . . .	81
VIII. The Holiness of God, . . .	94
IX. The Goodness of God, . . .	103
X. The Dominion of God, . . .	124
XI. The Patience of God, . . .	134

SELECTIONS FROM BATES.

Man's Original Conformity to God, . . .	147
Man's Fall, . . .	151
Divine Wisdom in Redemption, . . .	157
Excellence of the Gospel, . . .	167
Mercy of God in Redemption, . . .	181
The Greatness of Redeeming Love, . . .	186
Justice and Mercy concur in Redemption, . . .	202
The Holiness of God glorified, . . .	211
The Power of God glorified, . . .	218

SELECTIONS FROM GOODWIN.

	PAGE.
From an Exposition of the Epistle to the Ephesians, ...	229
From a Sermon on Psalm cxix.	275
From a Sermon on 1 Peter v. 10.	299
From a Sermon on Psalm xxviii.	305

SELECTIONS FROM WISHEART.

Necessity of a Knowledge of God's Attributes,	327
The Being of God, ...	331
God's Incomprehensibility, ...	334
God's Knowledge, ...	339
The Wisdom of God, ...	344
The Power of God, ...	347
The Holiness of God, ...	351
The Goodness of God, ...	356
The Patience of God, ...	359
The Mercy of God, ...	362
The Truth of God, ...	366
God's Eternity, ...	368
The Glory of God, ...	371
God's Glory our Chief End, ...	373
God's Blessedness, ...	381

**ON THE ATTRIBUTES
OF GOD,**

&c. &c.

BY THE REV. S. CHARNOCK.

ON THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD,

&c. &c.

I.—THE SPIRITUALITY OF GOD.

IN WHAT SENSE GOD IS CALLED A SPIRIT.

“God is a Spirit.” That is, he hath nothing corporeal, no mixture of matter, not a visible substance, a bodily form. *He is a spirit*, not a bare spiritual substance, but an understanding, willing spirit, holy, wise, good, and just. God is called a spirit, as being not a body, not having the greatness, figure, thickness, or length of a body, wholly separate from any thing of flesh and matter. We find a principle within us nobler than that of our bodies; and therefore we conceive the nature of God, according to that which is more worthy in us, and not according to that which is the vilest part of our natures. God is a most spiritual spirit, more spiritual than all angels, all souls. As he exceeds all in the nature of being, so he exceeds all in the nature of spirit; he hath nothing gross, heavy, material in his essence.

GOD A PURE SPIRITUAL BEING.

And when we say God is a spirit, it is a negation ; he is not a body ; he consists not of various parts, extended one without and beyond another : he is not a spirit so as our souls are, to be the form of any body : a spirit, not as angels and souls are, but infinitely higher ; we call him so, because in regard of our weakness, we have not any other term of excellency to express or conceive of him by : we transfer it to God in honour, because spirit is the highest excellency in our nature : yet we must apprehend God above any spirit, since his nature is so great, that he cannot be declared by human speech, perceived by human sense, or conceived by human understanding.

God is invisible. The apostle reckons this amongst his other perfections. *Now unto the King, eternal, immortal, invisible.* (1 Tim. i. 17.) He is invisible to our sense, which beholds nothing but material and coloured things ; and incomprehensible to our understanding that conceives nothing but what is finite. God is therefore a spirit incapable of being seen, and infinitely incapable of being understood. If he be invisible, he is also spiritual. If he had a body, and hid it from our eyes, he might be said not to be seen, but could not be said to be invisible. When we say a thing is visible, we understand that it hath such qualities which are the object of sense, though we may never see that, which in its own nature is to be seen. God hath no such qualities as fall under the perception of our sense. His works are visible to us, but not his godhead. (Rom. 1. 20.) The nature of a human body is to be seen and handled. Christ gives us such a description of it, (Luke xxiv. 39,) *Handle me and see, for a spirit hath not*

flesh and bones as you see me have: but man hath been so far from seeing God, *that it is impossible he can see him.* (1 Tim. vi. 16.) There is such a disproportion between an infinite object and a finite understanding, that it is utterly impossible either to behold or comprehend him. But if God had a body more luminous and glorious than that of the sun, he would be as visible to us as the sun, though the immensity of that light would dazzle our eyes, and forbid any close inspection into him by the virtue of our sense. We have seen the shape and figure of the sun, but *no man hath ever seen the shape of God.* (John v. 37.) If God had a body he were visible, though he might not perfectly and fully be seen by us; as we see the heavens, though we see not the extension, latitude, and greatness of them. Though God hath manifested himself in a bodily shape, (Gen. xviii. 1,) and elsewhere, Jehovah appeared to Abraham; yet the substance of God was not seen, no more than the substance of angels was seen in their apparitions to men. A body was formed to be made visible by them, and such actions done in that body, that spake the person that did them to be of a higher eminence than a bare corporeal creature. Sometimes a representation is made to the inward sense and imagination, as to Micaiah, 1 Kings xxii. 19, and to Isaiah vi. 1. But they saw not the essence of God, but some images and figures of him proportioned to their sense or imagination. The essence of God no man ever saw, nor can see. (John i. 18.)

IMPOSSIBLE TO REPRESENT GOD BY ANY IMAGE.

It is impossible to fashion any image of God. If our more capacious souls cannot grasp his nature, our weaker sense cannot frame his image. It is more possible of the two, to comprehend him in our

minds, than to frame him in an image to our sense. He inhabits inaccessible light. As it is impossible for the eye of man to see him, it is impossible for the art of man to paint him upon walls, and carve him out of wood. None knows him but himself, none can describe him but himself. Can we draw a figure of our own souls, and express that part of ourselves, wherein we are most like to God? Can we extend this to any bodily figure and divide it into parts? How can we deal so with the original copy, whence the first draught of our souls was taken, and which is infinitely more spiritual than men or angels? No corporeal being can represent a spiritual substance; there is no proportion in nature between them. God is a simple, infinite, immense, eternal, invisible, incorruptible Being: a statue is a compounded, finite, limited, temporal, visible, and corruptible body. God is a living spirit; but a statue nor sees, nor hears, nor perceives any thing. But suppose God had a body, it is impossible to mould any image of it in the true glory of that body. Can the statue of an excellent monarch represent the majesty and air of his countenance, though made by the most skilful workman in the world? If God had a body in some measure suited to his excellency, were it possible for man to make an exact image of him, who cannot picture the light, heat, motion, magnitude, and dazzling property of the sun? The excellence of any corporeal nature of the least creature, the temper, instinct, artifice, all are beyond the power of art; much more is God.

HOW TO CONCEIVE OF GOD AS A SPIRIT.

We cannot have an *adequate or suitable* conception of God. He dwells in inaccessible light; inaccessible to the acuteness of our fancy, as well as

the weakness of our sense. If we could have thoughts of him, as high and excellent as his nature; our conceptions must be as infinite as his nature. All our imaginations of him cannot represent him, because every created species is finite; it cannot therefore represent to us a full and substantial notion of an infinite being. We cannot speak or think worthily enough of him, who is greater than our words, vaster than our understandings. Whatsoever we speak or think of God, is handed first to us by the notice we have of some perfection in the creature, and explains to us some particular excellence of God rather than the fulness of his essence. No creature, nor all creatures together, can furnish us with such a magnificent notion of God, as can give us a clear view of him. Yet God in his word is pleased to step below his own excellence, and point us to those excellences in his works, whereby we may ascend to the knowledge of those excellences which are in his nature. But the creatures, whence we draw our lessons being finite, and our understandings being finite, it is utterly impossible to have a notion of God commensurate to the immensity and spirituality of his being.

Since we cannot have a full notion of him, we should endeavour to make it as high and as pure as we can. Though we cannot conceive of God, but some corporeal representations or images in our minds will be conversant with us, as motes in the air when we look upon the heavens; yet our conception may and must rise higher: as when we see the draught of the heavens and earth in a globe, or a kingdom in a map, it helps our conceptions, but does not terminate them: we conceive them to be of a vast extent, far beyond that short description of them. So we should endeavour to refine every representation of God; to rise higher and higher, and have our apprehensions still more purified;

separating the perfect from the imperfect, casting away the one, and greatening the other: conceive him to be a spirit diffused through all, containing all, perceiving all. All the perfections of God are infinitely elevated above the excellences of the creatures; above whatsoever can be conceived by the clearest and most piercing understanding. The nature of God as a spirit, is infinitely superior to whatsoever we can conceive perfect in the notion of a created spirit. Whatsoever God is, he is infinitely so: he is infinite wisdom, infinite goodness, infinite knowledge, infinite power, infinite spirit, infinitely distant from the weakness of creatures, infinitely above the excellences of creatures; as easy to be known *that he is*, as impossible to be comprehended *what he is*.

Conceive of him as excellent, without any imperfection. A spirit without parts; great without quantity; perfect without quality; every where without place; powerful without members; understanding without ignorance; wise without reasoning; light without darkness; infinitely more excelling the beauty of all creatures, than the light in the sun, pure and unviolated, exceeds the splendour of the sun, dispersed and divided through a cloudy and misty air. And when you have risen to the highest, conceive him yet infinitely above all you can conceive of spirit, and acknowledge the infirmity of your own minds. And whatsoever conception comes into your minds, say, this is not God, God is more than this. If I could conceive him, he were not God; for God is incomprehensibly above whatsoever I can say, whatsoever I can think, and conceive of him.

WHAT GOD IS TO US AS A SPIRIT.

What cannot so great a spirit do for us? What cannot so great a spirit work in us? God being a spirit above all spirits, can pierce into the centre of all spirits; make his way into the most secret recesses, and stamp what he pleases. It is no more to him to turn our spirits, than to make a wilderness become waters, and speak a chaos into a beautiful frame of heaven and earth. He can actuate our souls with infinitely more ease, than our souls can actuate our bodies; he can fix in us what motions, frames, and inclinations he pleases; he can come and settle in our hearts with all his treasures. It is an encouragement to confide in him, when we petition him for spiritual blessings: as he is a spirit, he is possessed with *spiritual blessings*. (Eph. i. 3.) A spirit delights to bestow things suitable to its nature, as bodies do to communicate what is agreeable to theirs: as he is a Father of spirits, we may go to him for the welfare of our spirits; he being a Spirit, is as able to repair our spirits, as he was to create them. As he is a Spirit, he is indefatigable in acting. The members of the body tire and flag; but who ever heard of a soul wearied with being active? Whoever heard of a weary angel? In the purest simplicity, there is the greatest power, the most efficacious goodness, the most reaching justice to affect the spirit, that can insinuate itself every where to punish wickedness without weariness, as well as to comfort goodness. God is active, because he is Spirit; and if we be like to God, the more spiritual we are, the more active we shall be.

God is a spirit in the highest excellence and glory of spirits; nothing is beyond him; nothing above him; no contrariety within him. This is our com-

fort, if we devote ourselves to him; *this God is our God*; this spirit is our spirit; this is our all, our immutable, our incorruptible support; a spirit that cannot die and leave us.

If God be a spirit, we see how we can only converse with him *by our spirits*. Bodies and spirits are not suitable to one another. We can only see, know, and embrace a spirit with our spirits. He judges not of us by our corporeal actions, nor our external devotions, by our masks and disguises. He fixes his eye upon the frame of the heart, bends his ear to the groans of our spirits; he is not pleased with outward pomp; he is not a body; therefore the beauty of temples, delicacy of sacrifices, fumes of incense, are not grateful to him; by those or any external action, we have no communion with him: "a *spirit when broken, is his delightful sacrifice.*" (Psalm li. 17.) We must therefore have our spirits fitted for him, (Eph. iv. 23,) *be renewed in the spirit of our minds*, that we may be in a posture to live with him, and have intercourse with him. We can never be united to God, but in our spirits; bodies unite with bodies, spirits with spirits. The more spiritual any thing is, the more closely does it unite. Air has the closest union, nothing meets together sooner than that when the parts are divided by the interposition of a body.

God the highest spirit, can only reach out a full content to our spirits. Man is lord of the creation; nothing below him can be fit for his converse; nothing above him offers itself to his converse but God. We have no correspondence with angels: the influence they have upon us, the protection they afford us, is secret and undiscerned; but God, the highest Spirit, offers himself to us in his Son, and in his ordinances; he is visible in every creature, he presents himself to us in every providence; to him we must seek; in him we must rest. God had no rest

from the creation, till he had made man; and man can have no rest in the creation, till he rests in God. God only is our *dwelling place*, (Psalm xc. 1); our souls should only *long for him*, (Psalm lxxiii. 1); our souls should only *wait upon him*. The spirit of man never riseth to its original glory, till carried up on the wings of faith and love to its original copy. The face of the soul looks most beautiful, when it is turned to the face of God the Father of spirits; when the derived spirit is fixed upon the original spirit, drawing from it life and glory. Spirit is only the receptacle of spirit. God as spirit is our principle; we must therefore live upon him. God as spirit, hath some resemblance to us as his image; we must therefore only satisfy ourselves in him.

CAUTION AGAINST SPIRITUAL SINS.

When we make our spirits, which are most like to God in their nature, and framed according to his image, the seat of vain imaginations, wicked desires, and unclean affections, we wrong God in the excellence of his work, and reflect upon the nobleness of the pattern; we wrong him in that part where he hath stamped the most signal character of his own spiritual nature; we defile that whereby we have only converse with him as a spirit, which he hath ordered more immediately to represent him in this nature, than all corporeal things in the world can, and make that spirit with whom we desire to be joined, unfit for such a union. God's spirituality is the root of his other perfections. We have already heard that he could not be infinite, omnipresent, immutable without it. Spiritual sins are the greatest root of bitterness within us. As grace in our spirits renders us more like to a spiritual God; so spiritual sins bring us into a conformity to a degraded devil. (Eph. ii.

2, 3.) Carnal sins change us from men to brutes and spiritual sins divest us of the image of God for the image of Satan. We should by no means degrade our spirits, which bear upon them the character of the spiritual nature of God, and were made for his residence: let us therefore behave ourselves towards God in all those ways which the spiritual nature of God requires us.

**SPIRITUAL WORSHIP OF GOD FOUNDED ON HIS
SPIRITUALITY.**

All God's perfections suppose him a spirit; all centre in this. His wisdom does not suppose him merciful, or his mercy suppose him omniscient. There may be distinct notions of these, but all suppose him to be of a spiritual nature. How cold and frozen will our devotions be, if we consider not his omniscience, whereby he discerns our hearts? How carnal will our services be, if we consider him no as a pure spirit? In our offers to, and transaction with men, we deal not with them as mere animals but as rational creatures; and we debase their natures if we treat them otherwise: and if we have not raised apprehensions of God's spiritual nature in our treating with him, but allow him only such frames as we think fit enough for men; we debase his spirituality to the littleness of our own being. We must therefore possess our souls with this, we shall else render him no better than a fleshly service. We do not much concern ourselves in those things of which we are utterly ignorant, or of which we have but slight apprehensions.

Ours must be that worship wherein the mind thinks of God, feels a sense of God, has the spirit consecrated to God, the heart glowing with affection to God. God is most visible in the frame of the

soul, it is there his image shines; he hath given us a jewel as well as a case, and the jewel as well as the case we must return to him. The spirit is God's gift, and must *return to him*, (Eccl. xii. 7); it must return to him in every service morally, as well as it must return to him at last physically. It is not fit we should serve our Maker only with that which is animal in us, and withhold from him that which constitutes us reasonable creatures; we must give him our bodies, but a *living sacrifice*. (Rom. xii. 1.) If the spirit be absent from God when the body is before him, we present a dead sacrifice; it is morally dead in the duty, though it be naturally alive in the posture and action. It is not an indifferent thing whether we worship God or not, nor is it an indifferent thing whether we worship him with our spirits or not.

The mercies of God are renewed every day upon our bodies as well as our souls; and therefore they ought to express a fealty to God for his bounty every day; 'both are from God, both should be for God. Man consists of body and soul, the service of man is the service of both. The body is to be sanctified as well as the soul, and therefore to be offered to God as well as the soul. Both are to be glorified, both are to glorify. As our Saviour's divinity was manifested in his body, so should our spirituality in ours. To give God the service of the body and not of the soul, is hypocrisy; to give God the service of the spirit and not of the body is sacrilege; to give him neither, atheism.'

God hath appointed some parts of worship which cannot be performed without the body, as sacraments; we have need of them because we are not wholly spiritual and incorporeal creatures. But the religion, which consists in externals only, is not for an intellectual nature: a worship purely intellectual is too sublime for a nature allied to sense and de-

pending much upon it: the Christian mode of worship is proportioned to both; it makes the sense to assist the mind, and elevates the spirit above the sense. Bodily worship helps the spiritual: the members of the body reflect back upon the heart, the voice bars distractions, the tongue sets the heart on fire in good as well as in evil. It is as much against the light of nature to serve God without external significations, as to serve him without the intention of the mind. As the invisible God declares himself to men by visible signs, so should we declare our invisible frames by visible expressions. God hath given us a soul and body in conjunction, and we are to serve him in the same manner he hath framed us.

SPIRITUAL WORSHIP FROM A SPIRITUAL NATURE.

Spiritual worship is a worship from a *spiritual nature*. Not only physically spiritual, so our souls are in their frame; but morally spiritual, by a renewing principle. The heart must be first cast into the mould of the gospel, before it can perform the worship required by the gospel. Adam, in Paradise, might perform a spiritual worship; but Adam fallen from his rectitude, could not. We being heirs of his nature, are heirs of his impotence: restoration to a spiritual life must precede any act of spiritual worship. As no work can be good, so no worship can be spiritual, till we are created in Christ. Christ is our life. As no natural action can be performed without life in the root or heart, so there can be no spiritual act without Christ in the soul; our being in Christ is as necessary to every spiritual act, as the union of soul and body is necessary to natural action.

As the root is, so is the fruit. If the soul be

habitually carnal, the worship cannot be actually spiritual: there may be an intention of spirit, but there is no spiritual principle as the root of that intention. A heart may be sensibly united with a duty, when it is not spiritually united with Christ in it. Carnal motives may fix the mind in an act of worship, as the sense of pressing affliction may enlarge a man's mind in prayer. Whatsoever is agreeable to the nature of God, must have the stamp of the grace of Christ in performance, as well as of his mediation in the acceptance of it. The apostle *lived not*, but *Christ lived in him*; the soul worships not, but Christ in him: not that Christ performs the act of worship; but enables us spiritually to worship, after he enables us spiritually to live. As God counts not any soul living but in Christ, so he counts not any spiritual worshipper but in Christ. The goodness and fatness of the fruit comes from the fatness of the olive wherein we are ingrafted: we must find healing in Christ's wings, before God can find spirituality in our services. All worship issuing from a dead nature, is but a dead service; a living action cannot be performed, without being knit to a living root.

SPIRITUAL WORSHIP FROM A UNITED HEART.

Spiritual worship is performed with a *united* heart. The heart is not only now and then with God, but united to fear or worship his name. (Psalm lxxxvi. 11.) A spiritual duty must have the assistance of the spirit, and the thoughts fixed upon the spiritual object: the union of all the parts of the heart together with the body, is the life of the body; and the moral union of our hearts, is the life of duty. A wandering divided heart makes not God his treasure; he slights the worship, and therein affronts

the object of it. All our thoughts ought to be delighted with God, and bound up in him. But when we start from him to gaze after every feather, and run after every bubble; we disown a full and affecting excellence, and a satisfying sweetness in him. When our thoughts run from God, it is a testimony we have no spiritual affection to God; affection would stake down the thoughts to the object affected: it is but a mouth-love, as the prophet phrases it, (Ezek. xxxiii. 31,) but their hearts go *after their covetousness*. Covetous objects pipe, and the heart danceth after them; and the thoughts of God are shifted off, to receive a multitude of other imaginations: the heart and the service staid a while together, and then took leave of one another. The Psalmist still found his heart with God when he awaked; still with God in spiritual affections, and fixed meditations. A carnal heart is never with God, either in or out of worship: if God should knock at the heart in any duty, it would be found not at home, but straying abroad. Our worship is spiritual, when the door of the heart is shut against all intruders, as our Saviour commands in closet duties. (Matt. vi. 6.) It was not his meaning to command the shutting the closet-door, and leave the heart-door open for every thought that would haunt us. Worldly affections are to be laid aside, if we would have our worship spiritual. This was meant by the Jewish custom of wiping or washing off the dust of their feet before their entrance into the temple; and of not bringing money in their girdles. To be spiritual in worship, is to have our souls gathered and bound up wholly in themselves, and offered to God.

SPIRITUAL WORSHIP IN THE EXERCISE OF FAITH.

Faith must be acted in worship. If a man have not faith, he is without Christ; and though a man be in Christ by the habit of faith, he performs a duty out of Christ, without an act of faith: without the habit of faith, our persons are out of Christ; and without the exercise of faith, the duties are out of Christ. As the want of faith in a person is the death of the soul; so the want of faith in a service, is the death of the offering. Though a man were at the cost of an ox; yet to kill it without bringing it to the *door of the tabernacle*, was not a sacrifice, but a murder. (Lev. xvii. 3, 4.) The tabernacle was a type of Christ; and looking to him is necessary in every spiritual sacrifice. As there must be faith to make any act an act of obedience; so there must be faith to make any act of worship spiritual.

SPIRITUAL WORSHIP IN THE EXERCISE OF LOVE.

In every act of worship, we should endeavour to be united to God, and become one spirit with him; this grace spiritualizes worship. In that one word love, God hath included all the devotion he requires of us, the total sum of the first table is, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God*. It is to be acted in every thing we do; but in worship, our hearts should more solemnly rise up and acknowledge him as amiable and lovely, since the law is stripped of its cursing power, and made sweet in the blood of the Redeemer. Love is a grace acceptable of itself; but nothing is acceptable without it. The gifts of one man to another are spiritualized by it. We would not value a present, without the affection of the donor: every

1

man would lay claim to the love of others, though he would not to their possessions. Love is God's right in every service, and the noblest thing we can bestow upon him in our adorations of him. God's gifts to us are not so estimable, without his love; nor our services valued by him, without the exercise of affection. Hezekiah regarded not his deliverance, without the love of the deliverer; *In love to my soul thou hast delivered me.* (Isaiah xxxviii. 17.) So doth God say, in love to my honour thou hast worshipped me.

SPIRITUAL WORSHIP IN THE EXERCISE OF JOY.

That cannot be a spiritual and evangelical worship, that hath nothing of the praise of God in the heart. The consideration of God's adorable perfections discovered in the gospel, will make us come to him with more seriousness; ask blessings of him with more confidence; fly to him with more faith and love, and more spiritually glorify him in our attendance upon him.

Since we are freed by the death of the Redeemer from the curses of the law, God requires of us a joy in spiritual privileges. A sad frame in worship gives the lie to all gospel liberty; to the purchase of the Redeemer's death; the triumphs of his resurrection; it is as if we were under the influences of the legal fire and lightning; it is entering a protest against the freedom of the gospel. Evangelical worship is spiritual, and praise, joy, and delight are prophesied of, as great ingredients in attendance on gospel ordinances. (Isaiah xii. 3—5.)

The angels in the first act of worship after the creation, were highly joyful. (Job xxxviii. 7.) They *shouted for joy*. The saints have particularly acted this in their worship. David would not content himself with an approach to the altar, without going

to God as his *exceeding joy*, (Psalm xliii. 4); my triumphant joy: when he danced before the ark, he seems to be transformed into delight and pleasure. (2 Sam. vi. 14, 16.) He had as much delight in worship, as others had in their harvest and vintage. And those that took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, would as joyfully attend upon the communications of God. Where there is a fulness of the spirit, there is a *making melody to God in the heart*; and where there is an acting of love, the proper fruit of it is joy in a near approach to the object of the soul's affection.

God requires a cheerfulness in his service, especially under the gospel, where he sits upon a throne of grace, and discovers his amiableness in the covenant of grace, and the sweet relation of a father. The priests of old were not to sully themselves with any sorrow, when they were in the exercise of their functions. God put a bar to the natural affections of Aaron and his sons, when Nadab and Abihu had been cut off. (Lev. x. 6.) Every true Christian in a higher order of priesthood, is a person dedicated to joy and peace, offering himself a lively sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; and there is no Christian duty, but is to be set off and seasoned with cheerfulness. He that *loves a cheerful giver* in acts of charity, requires no less a cheerful spirit in acts of worship; as this is an ingredient in worship, so it is the means to make your spirits intent in worship.

SPIRITUAL WORSHIP WITH REVERENCE OF GOD.

Spiritual worship is to be performed, though with a delight in God; yet *with a deep reverence of God*. The gospel in advancing the spirituality of worship, takes off the terror, but not the reverence of God;

which is nothing in its own nature, but a due high esteem of the excellency of a thing according to the nature of it. The angels are pure, and can fear him as sinners, but in reverence *they cover faces* when they stand before him. His power should make us reverence him, as we are creatures; justice as we are sinners; his goodness as we are restored creatures. God is clothed with unspeakable majesty; the glory of his face shines brighter than the lights of heaven in their beauty. Before him the angels tremble, and the heavens melt; ought not therefore to come before him with *sacrifice of fools*, nor tender a duty to him without falling low upon our faces, and bowing our heads in token of reverence.

SPIRITUAL WORSHIP WITH HUMILITY.

Our blessed Saviour, the most spiritual worshipper, prostrated himself in the garden with the greatest lowliness, and offered himself upon the cross a sacrifice with the greatest humility. Lowly souls, who worship, have the most spiritual conformity to the person of Christ in the state of humiliation, and design in that state: as worship without it is unsuitable to God, so neither is it advantageous for him. A time of worship, is a time of God's communion. The vessel must be melted to receive the stamp; it is designed for; softened wax is fittest to receive the stamp, and a spiritually melted heart is fittest to receive a spiritual impression. We can perform duty in an evangelical and spiritual state without the susceptible humble state which the gospel requires.

SPIRITUAL WORSHIP—NECESSITY OF SELF-EXAMINATION.

Let us *try ourselves concerning the manner of our worship*. We are now in the end of the world, and the dregs of time, wherein the apostle predicts, there may be much of a form, and *little of the power of godliness*; and therefore we should search into ourselves, whether it be not thus with us! Whether there be as much reverence in our spirits, as there may be devotion in our countenances and outward carriages.

1. How therefore are our hearts *prepared to worship*? What do we expect in our approaches to him? That which may make divine impressions upon us, and more exactly conform us to the divine nature? Or do we design nothing but an empty formality, without any openings of heart to receive the communications, which, according to the nature of the duty, might be conveyed to us? Can this be a spiritual worship? The soul then closely waits upon him, when its *expectation is only from him*. (Psalm lxii. 5.) Are our hearts seasoned with a sense of sin; a sight of our spiritual wants; raised notions of God; glowing affections to him; strong appetite after a spiritual fulness? Do we rouse up our sleepy spirits, and make a covenant with all that is within us to attend upon him? So much as we want of this, so much we come short of spiritual worship.

2. *How are our hearts fixed upon him*? How do they *cleave to him* in the duty? Do we resign our spirits to God, and make them an entire holocaust, a whole burnt-offering in his worship? Or do we not willingly admit carnal thoughts to mix themselves with spiritual duties, and fasten our minds to the creature, under pretences of directing them to

the Creator? Do we not pass a mere compliment on God, by some superficial act of devotion; while some covetous, envious, ambitious, voluptuous imagination may possess our minds?

3. How do we act our graces *in worship*? Though the instrument be strung, if the strings be not wound up, what melody can be the issue? All readiness and alacrity discover a strength of nature; and a readiness in spirituals, discovers a spirituality in the heart. As unaffected thoughts of God are not spiritual thoughts, so unaffected addresses to God are not spiritual addresses. Well then, what awakenings, and elevations of faith and love have we? What strong outflowings of our soul to him? What indignation against sins? What admirations of redeeming grace? How low have we brought our corruptions to the foot-stool of Christ, to be made his conquered enemies? How straitly have we clasped our faith about the cross and the throne of Christ, to become his intimate spouse? Do we in hearing hang upon the lips of Christ; in prayer take hold of God, and will not let him go; in confessions rend the caul of our hearts, and indite our souls before him with a deep humility? Do we act more by a soaring love than a drooping fear.

4. How do we find our hearts *after worship*? By an after-carriage, we may judge of the spirituality of it. How are we as to *inward strength*? When worship is spiritually performed, grace is more strengthened, corruption more mortified; the soul, like Samson after his awakening, goes out with renewed strength. As the inward man is renewed day by day, so it is renewed in every act of worship. When men are more prone to sin after duty, it is a sign there was no communion with God in it, and a greater strength of sin, because such an act is contrary to the end of worship, which is the subduing of sin. It is a sign that medicine hath had a

happy effect, which restores a better appetite; and so worship hath been well performed, when we have a stronger inclination to other acts pleasing to God, and a more sensible distaste of those temptations we too much relished before.

Now Jesus Christ in all his actions was an exact pattern of *humility*. After the institution and celebration of the supper, a special act of worship in the church; though he had a sense of all the authority his Father had given him, yet he *humbles himself to wash his disciples' feet*. And after his sublime prayer, (John xvii.) *he humbles himself to the death, and offers himself to his murderers*, because of his Father's pleasure. (John xviii. 1.) What is the end of God in appointing worship, is the end of a spiritual heart in offering it; not his own exaltation but God's glory.

What delight is there after it? What pleasure is there, and what is the object of that pleasure? Is it communion we have had with God, or a fluency in ourselves? Is it something which hath touched our hearts, or pleased our fancies? As the strength of sin is known by the delightful thoughts of it after the commission, so is the spirituality of duty, by the object of our delightful remembrance after the performance. It was a sign David was spiritual in the worship of God in the tabernacle, when he enjoyed it, because he longed for the spiritual part of it, when he was exiled from it. His desires were not only for liberty to revisit the tabernacle, but to see the *power and glory of God in the sanctuary*, as he had seen it before: his desires for it could not have been so ardent, if his reflection upon what had passed, had not been delightful; nor could his soul be poured out in him for the want of such opportunities, if the remembrance of the converse he had had with God, had not been accompanied with a delightful relish. (Psalm lxiii. 2; xlii. 4.)

II.—THE ETERNITY OF GOD.

ETERNITY DEFINED.

ETERNITY is a *perpetual duration, which hath neither beginning nor end*; time hath both. Those things we say are in time, that have beginning, grow up by degrees, have succession of parts. Eternity is contrary to time, and is therefore a permanent and immutable state; a perfect possession of life without any variation. It comprehends in itself all years, all ages, all periods of ages; it never begins! It endures after every duration of time, and never ceaseth; it as much outruns time, as it went before the beginning of it. Time supposes something before it, but there can be nothing before eternity, or it were then not eternity. Time hath a continual succession; the former time passeth away, and another succeeds; the last year is not this year, nor this year the next. We must conceive of eternity contrary to the notion of time; as the nature of time consists in the succession of parts, so the nature of eternity in an infinite immutable duration. Eternity and time differ as the sea and rivers; the sea never changes place, and is always one water; but the rivers glide along, and are swallowed up in the sea; so is time by eternity.

GOD IS ETERNAL.

Eternity is a negative attribute, and is denying of God any measures of time, as immensity is denying of him any bounds of place; as immensity is the diffusion of his essence, so eternity is the duration of his essence; and when we say God is eternal, we exclude from him all possibility of beginning and ending, all flux and change: as the essence of God cannot be bounded by any place, so it is not to be limited by any time; as it is his immensity to be every where, so it is his eternity to be always. As created things are said to be somewhere in regard of place, and to be present, past, or future, in regard of time; so the Creator, in regard of place, is every where; in regard of time, is *semper*: his duration is as endless, as his essence is boundless: he always was and always will be, and will no more have an end than he had a beginning; and this is an excellence belonging to the supreme Being. As his essence comprehends all beings and exceeds them, and his immensity surmounts all places; so his eternity comprehends all times, all durations, and infinitely excels them.

Time began with the foundation of the world, but God being before time, could have no beginning in time. Before the beginning of the creation, and the beginning of time, there could be nothing but eternity: nothing but what was uncreated, that is, nothing but what was *without beginning*. To be in time is to have a beginning; to be before all time is never to have a beginning, but always to be: for as between the Creator and creatures there is no medium, so between time and eternity there is no medium. It is as easily deduced, that he that was before all creatures is eternal, as he that made all creatures is God.

God *only* is immortal; he only is so by a necessity of nature: angels, souls, and bodies too, after the resurrection, shall be immortal: not by nature but grant; they are subject to return to nothing, if that word that raised them from nothing should speak them into nothing again: it is as easy with God to strip them of it as to invest them with it; nay, it is impossible but that they should perish, if God should withdraw his power from preserving them, which he exerted in creating them: but God is immoveably fixed in his own being; that as none gave him his life, so none can deprive him of his life, or the least particle of it; not a jot of the happiness and life, which God infinitely possesses, can be lost: it will be as durable to everlasting, as it hath been possessed from everlasting.

The creatures are in a perpetual change; something is acquired, or something lost every day. A man is the same in regard of existence when he is a man, as he was when he was a child; but there is a new succession of quantities and qualities in him: every day he acquires something till he comes to his maturity; every day he loses something till he comes to his period. A man is not the same at night that he was in the morning; something is expired and something is added; every day there is a change in his age, a change in his substance, a change in his accidents: but God hath his whole being in one and the same point, or moment of eternity; he receives nothing as an addition to what he was before; he loseth nothing of what he was before; he is always the same excellency and perfection in the same infiniteness as ever.

Of a creature it may be said, he was, or he is, or he shall be; of God it cannot be said, but only he is; he is what he always was, and he is what he always will be; whereas a creature is what he was not, and will be what he is not now; as it may be said of the

flame of a candle, it is flame, but it is not the same individual flame as was before, nor is it the same that will be presently after; there is a continual dissolution of it into air, and a continual supply for the generation of more; while it continues, it may be said there is a flame; yet not entirely one, but in a succession of parts; so of a man it may be said, he is in a succession of parts; but he is not the same that he was, and will not be the same that he is; but God is the same without any succession of part, and of time; of him it may be said, *He is*; he is no more now than he was, and he shall be no more hereafter than he is. God possesses a firm and absolute being, always constant to himself; he sees all things moving under him in a continual variation; he beholds the revolutions in the world without any change of his most glorious and immoveable nature; all other things pass from one state to another; from their original, to their eclipse and destruction: but God possesses his being in one indivisible point, having neither beginning nor end.

There is no succession *in the knowledge of God*. The variety of successions and changes in the world, make not succession or new objects in the divine mind; for all things are present to him from eternity in regard of his knowledge, though they are not actually present in the world in regard of their existence: he doth not know one thing now, and another anon; he sees all things at once; *known unto God are all things from the beginning of the world.* (Acts xv. 18.) All things are past, present, and to come in regard of their existence; but there is not past, present, and to come in regard of God's knowledge of them; because he sees and knows not by any other, but by himself; he is his own light by which he sees, his own glass wherein he sees; beholding himself, he beholds all things.

There is no succession in the *decrees of God*. He

doth not decree this now, which he decreed not before; for as his works were known from the beginning of the world, so his works were decreed from the beginning of the world; as they are known at once, so they are decreed at once; there is a succession in the execution of them, first grace, then glory; but the purpose of God for the bestowing of both, was in one and the same moment of eternity. *He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy.* (Eph. i. 4.)

CHRIST IS ETERNAL.

If God be of an eternal duration, then Christ is God: eternity is the property of God, but it is ascribed to Christ, (Col. i. 17,) *He is before all things*, i. e. all created things: he is therefore no creature; and if no creature, eternal. *All things were created by him*, both in heaven and in earth, angels as well as men, *whether they be thrones or dominions.* (Col. i. 16.) If all things were his creatures, then he is no creature; if he were, all things were not created by him, or he must create himself. He hath no difference of time; *for he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.* (Heb. xiii. 8.) The same with the name of God, I am, which signifies his eternity; he is no more to-day than he was yesterday, nor will be any other to-morrow than he is to-day; and therefore Melchisedeck, whose descent, birth and death, father and mother, beginning and end of days are not upon record, was a type of the existence of Christ without difference of time; *having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God.* (Heb. vii. 3.)

As the eternity of God is the ground of all religion, so the eternity of Christ is the ground of the Christian religion. Could our sins be perfectly expiated,

had he not an eternal divinity to answer for the offences committed against an eternal God? Temporary sufferings had been of little validity, without an infinity and eternity in his person to add weight to his passion.

THE ETERNITY OF GOD THE COMFORT OF HIS PEOPLE.

While God is eternal, and always the same, it is not possible that those that partake of his spiritual, should not also partake of his eternal life. It is from the consideration of the endlessness of the years of God that the church comforts herself, that *her children shall continue and their seed be established for ever.* (Psalm cii. 27, 28.) And from the eternity of God, Habakkuk concludes the eternity of believers, *Art not thou from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy one? We shall not die, O Lord.* (chap. i. 12.) After they are retired from this world, they shall live for ever with God without any change by the multitude of those imaginable years and ages that shall run for ever. It is that God that hath neither beginning nor end, that is our God; who hath not only immortality in himself, but immortality to give out to others.

The enjoyment of God will be as *fresh and glorious after many ages, as it was at first.* God is eternal, and eternity knows no change; there will then be the fullest possession without any decay in the object enjoyed. There can be nothing past, nothing future; time neither adds to it, nor detracts from it; that infinite fulness of perfection which flourisheth in him now, will flourish eternally, without any discolouring of it in the least by those innumerable ages that shall run to eternity, much less any despoiling him of them. *He is the same in his endless duration.* As God is, so will his eternity be, without succes-

sion, without division: the *fulness of joy* will be always present; without past to be thought of with regret for being gone; without future to be expected with tormenting desires. When we enjoy God, we enjoy him in his eternity without any change, an entire possession of all together, without the passing away of pleasures that may be wished to return, or expectation of future joys which might be desired to hasten. Time is fluid, but eternity is stable, and after many ages, the joys will be as savoury and satisfying, as if they had been but that moment first tasted by our hungry appetites.

When the glory of the Lord shall rise upon you, it shall be so far from ever setting, that after millions of years are expired, as numerous as the sands on the sea-shore, the sun, in the light of whose countenance you shall live, shall be as bright as at the first appearance. He will be so far from ceasing to flow, that he will flow as strong, as full, as at the first communication of himself in glory to the creature. God therefore, as sitting upon his throne of grace, and acting according to his covenant, is like a *jasper-stone*, which is of a green colour, a colour always delightful, because God is always vigorous, and flourishing; a pure act of life, sparkling, new, and fresh rays of life and light to the creature, flourishing with a perpetual spring, and contenting the most capacious desire; forming your interest, pleasure, and satisfaction, with an infinite variety, without any change or succession: he will have variety to increase delights, and eternity to perpetuate them; this will be the fruit of the enjoyment of an infinite, an eternal God. He is not a cistern but a fountain, wherein water is always living and never putrifies.

If God be eternal, here is a strong ground of *comfort against all the distresses of the church, and the threats of the church's enemies*. The first discovery of the name, I am, which signifies the divine eternity

as well as immutability, was for the comfort of the oppressed Israelites in Egypt. It was then published from the secret place of the Almighty, as the only strong cordial to refresh them. It hath not yet, it shall not ever, lose its virtue in any of the miseries that have or shall successively befall the church. It is a comfort as durable as the God whose name it is. He is still I am, and the same to the church, as he was then to his Israel. His spiritual Israel have a greater right to the glories of it, than the carnal Israel could have. No oppression can be greater than theirs; what was a comfort suited to that distress, hath the same suitableness to every other oppression. It was not a temporary name, but a name for ever; his *memorial to all generations*, and reacheth to the church of the Gentiles, with whom he treats as the God of Abraham, ratifying that covenant by the Messiah, which he made with Abraham the father of the faithful.

Since God is eternal, he hath power to be *as good as his word*. His promises are established upon his eternity, and this perfection is a main ground of trust: *Trust in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.* (Isaiah xxvi. 4.) His wisdom, will, and truth, have always been, and will to eternity be the same. He wants not life, any more than love, for ever to help us; since his word is past, he will never fail us; since his life continues, he can never be out of a capacity to relieve us; and therefore whenever we foolishly charge him by our distrustful thoughts, we forget his love, which made the promise, and his eternal life, which can accomplish it. As his word is the ground of our trust, and his truth is the assurance of his sincerity, so his eternity is the assurance of his ability to perform his word. *His word stands for ever.* (Isaiah xl. 8.)

As his sovereignty in giving precepts had not been a strong ground of obedience, without considering

him as an eternal law-giver, who could maintain his rights; so his kindness in making the promises, had not been a strong ground of confidence, without considering him as an eternal promiser, whose thoughts, and whose life can never perish. And this may be one reason, why the Holy Ghost mentions so often the *post*-eternity of God, and so little his *ante*-eternity: because that is the strongest foundation of our faith and hope, which respects chiefly that which is future, and not that which is past; yet indeed no assurance of his after-eternity can be had, if his *ante*-eternity be not certain. If he had a beginning, he may have an end; and if he had any change in his nature, he might have in his counsels; but since all the resolves of God are as himself is, eternal, and all the promises of God are the fruits of his counsel, therefore they cannot be changed: if he should change them for the better, he would not have been eternally wise to know what was best; if for the worse, he had not been eternally good or just.

AN ETERNAL GOD THE OBJECT OF OUR SUPREME
AFFECTION.

If God be eternal, how worthy is he of our *choicest affections, and strongest desires of communion with him!* The beams of his goodness to us, are to direct our thoughts and affections to him; but his own external excellency ought to be the ground and foundation of our affections to him. And truly, since nothing but God is eternal, nothing but God is worth loving; and we do but a just right to our love, to fix it upon that which can always possess us, and be possessed by us; upon an object that cannot deceive our affection, and put it out of countenance by a dissolution.

III.—IMMUTABILITY OF GOD.

NECESSARY TO HIS DEITY.

GOD is unchangeable in *his essence, nature and perfections*. Immutability and eternity are linked together; and indeed true eternity is true immutability, whence eternity is defined the possession of an immutable life. Yet immutability differs from eternity in our conception: immutability respects the essence or existence of a thing, eternity the duration of a being in that state; or rather, *immutability is the state itself*, eternity is the measure of that state.

HIS PERFECTION.

The immutability of God is *a perfection*. Immutability considered in itself, without relation to other things, is not a perfection. It is the greatest misery and imperfection of the evil angels, that they are immutable in malice against God. But as God is infinite in essence, infinitely good, wise, holy; so it is a perfection necessary to his nature, that he should be immutably all this; all excellency, goodness, wisdom, immutably all that he is; without this he would be an imperfect being.

IMPLIED IN THE NAME JEHOVAH.

The name Jehovah signifies this attribute, (Exo. iii. 14,) I am that I am, I am *hath sent me to you*. signifies his immutability as well as eternity. *I am* signifies his eternity; *that* or *the same that I am*, his immutability. As it respects the essence of God, signifies his unchangeable being from eternity to eternity. As it respects the creature, it signifies his constancy in his counsels and promises, which spring from no other cause but the unchangeableness of his nature. { The reason why men stand not to the covenant, is because they are not always the same *I am*, that is, I am the same, before the creation of the world, and since the creation of the world before the entrance of sin, and since the entrance of sin; before their going into Egypt, and while they remain in Egypt. The very name Jehovah bears according to the grammatical order, a mark of God's unchangeableness; it never hath any thing added to it, nor any thing taken from it; it hath no plural number, no affixes, a custom peculiar to the eastern language; it never changes its letters as other words do.

GROUND OF EXHORTATION.

Prefer an immutable God before mutable creature
Is it not a horrible thing to see what we are, and what we possess, daily crumbling to dust, and in continual departing from us; and not seek out something that is permanent, and always abides the same, for our portion? In God, or wisdom, which is Christ, there is *substance*, in which respect he is opposed to all things in the world, that are but

shadows, that are shorter or longer according to the motion of the sun; mutable also, by every little body that intervenes. God is subject to no decay within, to no force without; nothing in his own nature can change him from what he is, and there is no power above can hinder him from being what he will to the soul: he is an ocean of all perfection: he wants nothing without himself to render him blessed, which may allure him to a change: his creatures can want nothing out of him to make them happy, whereby they may be enticed to prefer any thing before him. If we enjoy other things, it is by God's donation, who can as well withdraw them as bestow them; and it is but as reasonable as well as a necessary thing, to endeavour the enjoyment of the immutable Benefactor, rather than his revocable gifts.

If the creatures had a sufficient virtue in themselves to engross our souls, yet when we take a prospect of a fixed and unchangeable being, what beauty, what strength have any of those things to vie with him? How can they bear up and maintain their interest against a lively thought and sense of God? All the glory of them would fly before him, like that of the stars before the sun: they were once nothing, they may be nothing again; as their own nature brought them not out of nothing, so their nature secures them not from being reduced to nothing.

God does not act any thing barely by an immutable will, but by an immutable wisdom, and an unchangeable rule of goodness; and therefore we should not only acquiesce in what he works, but have a complacency in it; and by having our wills thus knitting themselves with the immutable will of God, we attain some degree of likeness to him in his own unchangeableness. When therefore God hath manifested his will in opening his decree to the world by his work of providence; we must cease all

disputes against it, and with Aaron *hold our peace*, though the affliction be very smart. *All flesh must be silent before God*; for whatsoever is his counsel, shall stand, and cannot be recalled; all struggling against it, is like a brittle glass contending with a rock; for *if he cut off and shut up, or gather together*, then *who can hinder him?* (Job xi. 10.) Nothing can help us, if he hath determined to afflict us; as nothing can hurt us, if he hath determined to secure us. The more clearly God hath evidenced this or that to be his will, the more sinful is our struggling against it.

A steadfast obedience is encouraged by an unchangeable God to reward it. (1 Cor. xv. 58.) *Be steadfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.* Unsteadfastness is the mark of an hypocrite, steadfastness of a saint. It is the character of a righteous person to *keep the truth*, (Isaiah xxvi. 2,) and it is as positively said, that *he that abides not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God*, (2 John 9,) but he that does, *hath both the Father and the Son*. So much of uncertainty, so much of nature; so much of firmness in duty, so much of grace. We can never honour God unless we finish his work; as Christ did not glorify God but in *finishing the work God gave him to do*. The nearer the world comes to an end, the more is God's immutability seen in his promises and predictions, and the more must our unchangeableness be seen in our obedience, (Heb. x. 23, 25,) *Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, and so much the more as you see the day approaching.*

IV.—THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD.

AN ESSENTIAL PRESENCE.

As eternity is the perfection whereby he hath neither beginning nor end; immutability is the perfection whereby he hath neither increase nor diminution: so immensity or omnipresence is that whereby he hath neither bounds nor limitation. As he is in all time, yet so as to be above time; so is he in all places, yet so as to be above limitation by any place. It was a good expression of a heathen to illustrate this, that God is a sphere or circle, whose centre is every where, and circumference no where. His meaning was, that the essence of God was indivisible; i. e. could not be divided. It cannot be said, here and there the lines of it terminate; it is like a line drawn out in infinite spaces, that no point can be conceived where its length and breadth ends. The sea is a vast mass of waters; yet to that it is said, *hitherto shalt thou go, and no further*. But it cannot be said of God's essence, hitherto it reaches, and no further; here it is, and there it is not. It is plain, that God is thus immense, because he is infinite; we have reason and scripture to assent to it, though we cannot conceive it. We know that God is eternal, though eternity is too great to be measured by the short line of a created understanding. We cannot conceive the vastness and glory of the heavens, much less that which is so great, as to *fill* heaven and

earth ; yea, *not to be contained in the heaven of heavens.* (1 Kings viii. 27.)

His spirit is not bestowed upon all, to reside in their hearts, enlighten their minds, and bedew them with refreshing comforts : when the apostle speaks of God's being *above all*, and *through all* : *above all* in his majesty, *through all* in his providence ; he doth not appropriate that, as he doth what follows, *and in you all* ; in you all by a special grace ; as God was specially present with Christ by the grace of union, so he is specially present with his people by the grace of regeneration. (Ephes. iv. 6.) So there are several manifestations of his presence ; he hath a presence of glory in heaven, whereby he comforts the saints ; a presence of wrath in hell, whereby he torments the damned ; in heaven he is a God spreading his beams of light ; in hell, a God distributing his strokes of justice ; by the one he fills heaven, by the other he fills hell ; by his providence and essence he fills both heaven and earth.

The effects of his power and wisdom are seen in the world, but his essence is invisible ; and this the Psalmist elegantly expresseth : *Whither shall I go from thy Spirit ? Or whither shall I fly from thy presence ? If I ascend up to heaven, thou art there ; if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there ; if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right-hand shall hold me.* (Psalm cxxxix. 7—9.) Had I wings endued with as much quickness as the first dawns of the morning light, or the first darts of any sun-beam that spreads itself through the hemisphere, and passes many miles in as short a space as I can think a thought, I should find thy presence in all places before me, and could not fly out of the infinite compass of thy essence.

He is essentially present *with all creatures*. If he be in all places, it follows that he is with all crea-

tures in those places ; as he is in heaven, so he is with all angels ; as he is in hell, so he is with all devils ; as he is in the earth and sea, so he is with all creatures inhabiting those elements. As his essential presence was the ground of the first being of things by creation, so it is the ground of the continued being of things by conservation. As his essential presence was the original, so it is the support of the existence of all the creatures. What are all those magnificent expressions of his creative virtue, but testimonies of his essential presence at the laying of the foundation of the world? *When he measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance.* (Isaiah xl. 12.) He sets forth the power and majesty of God in the creation and preservation of things, and every expression testifies his presence with them. The waters that were upon the face of the earth at first, were no more than a drop in the palm of a man's hand, which in every part is touched by his hand. And thus he is equally present with the degraded devils, as well as the most exalted angels ; with the lowest dust as well as with the brightest sun. He is equally present with the damned and the blessed, as he is an infinite Being, but not in regard of his goodness and grace.

EXPRESSIONS OF SCRIPTURE CONSIDERED.

Nor do the expressions of God's *coming to us*, or *departing from us*, impair this doctrine of his omnipresence.

God may be far from us in one respect, and near to us in another ; far from us in regard of comfort, yet near to us in regard of support, when his

essential presence continues the same: this is a necessary consequent upon the infinity of God, the other is an act of the will of God; so he was said to forsake Christ, in regard of his obscuring his glory from his human nature, and inflicting his wrath; though he was near to him in regard of his grace, and preserved him from contracting any spot in his sufferings. We do not say the sun is departed out of the heavens when it is beclouded; it remains in the same part of the heavens, passes on its course, though its beams do not reach us by reason of the bar between us and it. The soul is in every part of the body, in regard of its substance, and constantly in it, though it does not act so sprightly and vigorously at one time as another in one and the same member, and discover itself so sensibly in its operations; so all the various effects of God towards the sons of men, are but divers operations of one and the same essence.

He is far from us, or near to us, as he is a Judge or Benefactor; when he comes to punish, it notes not the approach of his essence, but the stroke of his justice; when he comes to benefit, it is not by a new access of his essence, but an efflux of his grace; he departs from us when he leaves us to the frowns of his justice; he comes to us when he encircles us in the arms of his mercy; but he was equally present with us in both dispensations, in regard of his essence.

HIS ESSENTIAL PRESENCE NO DISPARAGEMENT TO
GOD.

Nor is the essential presence of God with all creatures *any disparagement to him*. Since it was no disparagement to create the heaven and the earth, it is no disparagement to him to fill them; if he were

essentially present with them, when he created them, it is no dishonour to him to be essentially present with them, to support them; if it were his glory to create them by his essence, when they were nothing; can it be his disgrace to be present by his essence, since they are something, and something good, and very good in his eye? God saw every thing, and *behold it was very good*, (Gen. i. 31,) all ordered to declare his goodness, wisdom, power, and to make him adorable to man, and therefore he took complacency in them. There is a harmony in all things, a combination in them for those glorious ends for which God created them; and is it a disgrace for God to be present with his own harmonious composition? Is it not a musician's glory to touch with his fingers the treble, the least and tenderest string, as well as the strongest and greatest bass? Hath not every thing some stamp of God's own being upon it, since he eminently contains in himself the perfections of all his works? Whatsoever hath being, hath a footstep of God upon it, who is all being; every thing in the earth is his footstool, having a mark of his foot upon it, all declare the being of God, because they had their being from God; and will God account it any disparagement to him to be present with that which confirms his being, and the glorious perfections of his nature to his intelligent creatures? the meanest things are not without their virtues, which may boast God's being the Creator of them; and rank them in the midst of his works of wisdom as well as power.

GOD INCOMPREHENSIBLE.

How *wonderful* is God, and how like unto *nothing* are creatures! *Ascribe ye greatness to our God*, (Deut. xxxii. 3); he is admirable in the consideration of his power, in the extent of his understanding, and no less wonderful in the immensity of his essence; that as Austin saith, he is in the world, yet not confined to it; he is out of the world, yet not debarred from it; he is above the world, yet not elevated by it; he is below the world, yet not depressed by it; he is above all, equalled by none; he is in all, not because he needs them, but they stand in need of him; this as well as eternity, makes a vast disproportion between God and the creature. The creature is bounded by a little space, and no space is so great as to bound the Creator. By this we may take a prospect of our own nothingness; as in the consideration of God's holiness we are minded of our own impurity; and in the thoughts of his wisdom have a view of our own folly; and in the meditation of his power, have a sense of our weakness; so his immensity should make us according to our own nature, appear little in our own eyes.

What little, little, little things are we when compared with God! Less than an atom in the beams of the sun; poor drops to a God that fills heaven and earth, and yet dare we to boast against him, and dash ourselves against a rock? If the consideration of ourselves in comparison with others, be apt to puff us up, the consideration of ourselves in comparison with God, will be sufficient to humble us. If we consider him in the greatness of his essence, there is but little more proportion between him and us, than between being and not being, than between a drop and the ocean. How should we ever think

of God without a holy admiration of his greatness, and a deep sense of our own littleness! And as the angels cover their faces before him; with what awe should such worms as we are come into his sight! And since God fills heaven and earth with his presence, we should fill heaven and earth with his glory; for this end he created angels to praise him in heaven, and men to worship him on earth, that the places he fills with his presence may be filled with his praise: we should be swallowed up in admirations of the immensity of God, as men are at the first sight of the sea, when they behold a mass of waters, without beholding the bounds and immense depth of it.

How much is this attribute of God *forgotten or contemned!* We pretend to believe him to be present every where, and yet many live as if he were present no where.

It is commonly *forgotten, or not believed.* All the extravagances of men may be traced to the forgetfulness of this attribute, as their spring.

NOTHING HID FROM GOD.

No thought is hid, no lust is secret, but the eye of God beholds all. He is present with our heart when we imagine, with our hands when we act. We may exclude the sun from our solitudes, but not the eyes of God from beholding our actions. *The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.* (Prov. xv. 3.) He lies in the depths of our souls, and sees afar off our designs before we have conceived them. He is in the greatest darkness, as well as the clearest light; in the closest thought of the mind, as well as the openest expressions.

Nothing can be hid from him, no, not in the darkest cells, or thickest walls. *He compasseth our*

path wherever we are, and is acquainted with all our ways. (Psalm cxxxix. 3.) He is as much present with wicked men to observe their sins, as he is to detest them. Where he is present in his essence, he is present in his attributes; in his holiness to hate, and in his justice to punish, if he please to speak the word. It is strange men should not be mindful of this, when their very sins themselves might put them in mind of his presence. Whence hast thou the power to act? Who preserves thy being, whereby thou art capable of committing that evil? Is it not his essential presence that sustains us, and his arm that supports us? And where can any man *fly from his presence*? Not the vast regions of heaven could shelter a sinning angel from his eye. How was Adam ferreted out of his hiding-places in Paradise? Nor can we find in the depths of the sea a sufficient covering to us. If we were with Jonah shut up in the belly of a whale; if we had the *wings of the morning*, as quick a motion as the light at the dawning of the day, that doth in an instant surprise and over-power the regions of darkness; and could pass to the *utmost parts of the earth or hell*, there we should find him, *there his eye would be upon us*, there would his hand lay hold of us, and lead us as a conqueror triumphing over a captive. Nay, if we could leap out of the compass of heaven and earth, we should find as little reserves from him. He is without the world in those infinite spaces which the mind of man can imagine. In regard of his immensity, nothing in being can be distant from him, wheresoever it is.

THE CONSOLATION OF BELIEVERS.

The omnipresence of God is a comfort in *sharp afflictions*. Good men have a comfort in this presence in their prisons, and before oppressing tribunals. In

the overflowing *waters*, or scorching *flames*, *he is still with them*: and many times by his presence keeps the *bush from consuming*, when it seems to be all in a flame. In afflictions God shews himself most present, when friends are most absent: *When my father and mother forsake me, then the Lord shall take me up*, (Psalm xxvii. 10,) then God will stoop and gather me into his protection; *shall gather me*, (Heb.) alluding to those tribes that were to bring up the rear in the Israelites' march, to take care that none were left behind, and exposed to famine or wild beasts, by reason of some disease that disabled them from keeping pace with their brethren.

The omnipresence of God is a comfort in *all duties*. He is present to observe, and present to accept our petitions, and answer our suits. Good men have not only the essential presence, which is common to all, but his gracious presence; not only the presence that flows from his nature, but that which flows from his promise.

This presence is not without the special presence of *all his attributes*. Where his essence is, his perfections are; because they are one with his essence; yea, they are his essence, though they have their several degrees of manifestation. As in the covenant, he makes over himself as our God, not a part of himself, but his whole Deity; so in promising his presence, he means not a part of it, but the whole, the presence of all the excellences of his nature to be manifested for our good. It is not a part of God is here, and another there, but God in his whole essence and perfections; in his wisdom to guide us, his power to protect and support us, his mercy to pity us, his fulness to refresh us, and his goodness to relieve us. He is ready to display this or that perfection, as the necessities of his people require, and his own wisdom directs for his own honour. So that being not far from us in any excel-

lence of his nature, we can quickly have recourse to him upon any emergency; so that if we are miserable, we have the presence of his goodness; if we want direction, we have the presence of his wisdom; if we are weak, we have the presence of his power; and should we not rejoice in it, as in the presence of a powerful, wealthy, and compassionate friend?

TO BE MUCH THOUGHT OF.

The influence which the omnipresence of God should have upon our spirits and conduct ought to be much in *the actual thoughts* of his truth. How should we enrich our understandings with the knowledge of the excellency of God, whereof this is none of the least; we should, though it be more terrible to the wicked than the presence of a lion; it is this that makes all other excellences of the divine nature sweet: what would grace, wisdom, power signify at a distance from us? Let us frame in our minds a strong idea of it; it is this makes so great a difference between the actions of one man and another; one maintains actual thoughts of it, another doth not; though all believe it as a perfection pertaining to the infiniteness of his essence. David, or rather a greater than David, had God *always before him*; there was no time, no occasion, wherein he did not stir up some lively thoughts of him. (Psalm xvi. 8.)

How much will the presence of the sun outshine the stars of lesser comforts, and fully answer the want of them! The ark of God going before us, can only make all things successful; it was this led the Israelites over Jordan, and settled them in Canaan. Without this we signify nothing; should we live without this, we cannot be distinguished for ever from devils; his essential presence they have, and if we have no more, we shall be no better. It is the

enlivening, fructifying presence of the sun, that revives the languishing earth; and this only can repair our ruined soul. Let it be therefore our desire, that as he fills heaven and earth by his essence, he may fill our understandings and wills by his grace; that we may have another kind of presence with us, than animals have in their brutish state, or devils in their chains. His essential presence maintains our being, but his gracious presence confers and continues happiness.

V.—THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

DEFINED.

GOD hath an *infinite* knowledge and understanding : all knowledge. Omnipresence which we spake of before, respects his essence ; omniscience respects his understanding, according to our manner of conception.

The knowledge of God in scripture has various names, according to the various relations or objects of it. In respect of *present* things, it is called knowledge or sight ; with respect of things *past*, remembrance ; in respect of things *future*, or to *come*, it is called fore-knowledge, or prescience. (1 Peter i. 2.) In regard of the universality of the objects, it is called omniscience ; in regard of the simple understanding of things, it is called knowledge ; in regard of acting, and modelling the ways of acting, it is called wisdom and prudence. (Eph. i. 8.) He must have knowledge, otherwise he could not be wise ; wisdom is the flower of knowledge, and knowledge is the root of wisdom.

God is described in Zech. iii. 9, *with seven eyes*, to shew his perfect knowledge of all things, all occurrences in the world ; and the *cherubim*, or whatsoever is meant by the *wings*, are described to be *full of eyes*, both *before and behind*, round about them ; much more is God all eye, all ear, all understanding.

(Ezek. i. 18.) The sun is a natural image of God; if the sun had an eye, it would see; if it had an understanding, it would know all visible things; it would see what it shines upon, and understand what it influenceth in the most obscure bowels of the earth. Doth God excel his creature the sun in excellence and beauty, and not in light and understanding? Certainly, more than the sun excels an atom or grain of dust.

GOD KNOWS ALL CREATURES.

He knows *all creatures* from the highest to the lowest, the least as well as the greatest. He knows *the ravens and their young ones; the drops of rain and dew which he hath begotten: He knows all the fowls in the mountains, and the wild beasts in the field; which some read creeping things. The clouds are numbered in his wisdom.* (Job xxxviii. 37.) Every worm in the earth, every drop of rain that falls upon the ground, the flakes of snow, and the knots of hail, the sands upon the sea-shore, the hairs upon the head, it is no more absurd to imagine that God knows them, than that God made them; they are all the effects of his power, as well as the stars, which he calls by their names, as well as the most glorious angel and blessed spirit; he knows them as well as if there were none but them in particular for him to know; the least things were framed by his art as well as the greatest; the least things partake of his goodness as well as the greatest; he knows his own arts, and his own goodness, and therefore all the stamps and impressions of them upon all his creatures; he knows the immediate causes of the least, and therefore the effects of those causes. Since his knowledge is infinite, it must extend to those things which are at the greatest distance from him, to those which ap-

proach nearest to not being ; since he did not want power to create, he cannot want understanding to know every thing he hath created, the dispositions, qualities, and virtues of the minutest creature.

GOD KNOWS ALL THOUGHTS.

As God knows all the actions of creatures, so he knows *all the thoughts* of creatures. The thoughts are the most closeted acts of man, hid from men and angels, unless disclosed by some outward expressions ; but God descends into the depths and abysses of the soul, discerns the most inward contrivances ; nothing is impenetrable to him ; the sun doth not so much enlighten the earth, as God understands the heart ; all thoughts are as visible to him as flies and motes inclosed in a body of transparent chrystal. This man naturally allows to God. Men often speak to God by the motions of their minds and secret ejaculations ; which they would not do, if it were not naturally implanted in them, that God knows all their inward motions ; the scripture is plain and positive in this, *He tries the heart and the reins*, as men by the use of fire discern the drossy and purer parts of metal, The secret intentions and aims, the most lurking affections seated in the reins ; he knows that which no man, no angel is able to know ; which a man himself knows not, nor makes any particular reflection upon ; yea, *he weighs the spirit*, he exactly numbers all the devices and inclinations of men, as men do every piece of coin they tell out of a heap.

He discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart, all that is in the mind, all that is in the affections, every stirring and purpose ; so that not one *thought* can be withheld from him, yea, *hell and destruction are before him*, much more then the hearts of the children of men.

(Prov. xv. 11.) God knows the whole state of the dead, all the receptacles and graves of their bodies, all the bodies of men consumed by the earth, or devoured by living creatures; things that seem to be out of all being; he knows the thoughts of the devils and damned creatures, whom he hath cast out of his care for ever, into the arms of his justice, never more to cast a delightful glance towards them; not a secret in any soul in hell is hid from him; much more is he acquainted with the thoughts of living men, the counsels of whose hearts are yet to be manifested, in order to their trial and censure; yea, he knows them before they spring up into actual being, *Thou understandest my thoughts afar off*, (Psalm cxxxix. 2); my thoughts, that is, every thought; though innumerable thoughts pass through me in a day, and that in the source and fountain, before it is our thought; if he knows them before their existence, before they can be properly called ours, much more doth he know them when they actually spring up in us; he knows the tendency of them, where the bird will light when it is in flight; he knows them exactly, he is therefore called a *discerner* or criticiser of the heart. (Heb. iv. 12.)

GOD'S FORE-KNOWLEDGE OF MEN'S ACTIONS.

If *the free acts* of men were unknown before to God, no man can see *how there can be any government of the world by him*. Such contingencies may happen, and such resolves of men's freewills unknown to God, as may perplex his affairs, and put him upon new counsels and methods for attaining those ends which he settled at the first creation of things: if things happen, which God knows not of before, this must be the consequence; where there is no fore-

sight there is no providence ; things may happen so sudden, if God be ignorant of them, that they may give a check to his intentions and scheme of government, and put him upon changing the model of it. How often doth a small intervening circumstance, unforeseen by man, dash in pieces a long-meditated and well-formed design ? To govern necessary causes, as sun and stars, whose effects are natural and constant in themselves, is easy to be imagined ; but how to govern the world, that consists of so many men of free-will, able to determine themselves to this or that, and which have no constancy in themselves, as the sun and stars have, cannot be imagined, unless we allow in God as great a certainty of fore-knowledge of the designs and actions of men, as there is inconstancy in their resolves.

God must be altering the methods of his government every day, every hour, every minute, according to the determinations of men, which are so various and changeable in the whole compass of the world in the space of one minute ; he must wait to see what the counsels of men will be, before he could settle his own methods of government ; and so must govern the world according to their mutability, and not according to any certainty in himself. But his *counsel is stable* in the midst of multitudes of free devices in the heart of man, (Prov. xix. 21,) and knowing them all before, orders them to be subservient to his own stable counsel. If he cannot know what to-morrow will bring forth in the mind of a man, how can he certainly settle his own determination of governing him ? His decrees and resolves must be temporal, and arise *pro re nata*, and he must always be in counsel what he should do upon every change of men's minds. This is an unworthy conceit of the infinite majesty of heaven, to make his government depend upon the resolves of men, rather than their resolves upon the design of God.

DOES NOT NECESSITATE THE WILL.

God's fore-knowledge of man's voluntary actions *doth not necessitate the will of man*. The fore-knowledge of God is not deceived, nor the liberty of man's will diminished.

But what if the fore-knowledge of God, and the liberty of the will, *cannot be fully reconciled by man*? shall we therefore deny a *perfection in God to support a liberty in ourselves*? Shall we rather fasten ignorance upon God, and accuse him of blindness, to maintain our liberty? That God fore-knew every thing, and yet that there is liberty in the rational creature, are both certain; but how fully to reconcile them, may surmount the understanding of man. Some truths the disciples were not capable of bearing in the days of Christ; and several truths our understandings cannot reach as long as the world lasts; yet in the mean time we must on the one hand take heed of conceiving God to be ignorant, and on the other hand of imagining the creature necessitated; the one will render God imperfect, and the other will seem to render him unjust, in punishing man for that sin which he could not avoid, but was brought into by a fatal necessity. God is sufficient to render a reason of his own proceedings, and clear up all at the day of judgment; it is a part of man's curiosity since the fall, to be prying into God's secrets, things too high for him; whereby he confounds his understanding. It is a cursed affectation that runs in the blood of Adam's posterity, *to know as God*, though our first father smarted and ruined his posterity in that attempt; the ways and knowledge of God are as much *above our thoughts and conceptions, as the heavens are above the earth*, (Isaiah lv. 9,) and so sublime, that we cannot com-

prehend them in their true and just greatness ; his designs are so mysterious, and the ways of his conduct so profound, that it is not possible to dive into them : the force of our understandings is below his infinite wisdom, and therefore we should adore him with an humble astonishment, and cry out with the apostle, *Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out !* (Rom. xi. 33.) Whenever we meet with depths that we cannot fathom, let us remember that he is God, and we his creatures ; and not be guilty of so great extravagance, as to think that a subject can pierce into all the secrets of a prince, or a work understand all the operations of the artificer. Let us only resolve not to fasten any thing on God that is unworthy of the perfection of his nature, and dishonourable to the glory of his majesty ; nor imagine that we can ever step out of the rank of creatures to the glory of the Deity to understand fully every thing in his nature.

PROVED BY THE ACCUSATIONS OF CONSCIENCE.

The *accusations of conscience* evidence God's knowledge of all actions of all his creatures. Doth not conscience check for the most secret sins, to which none are privy but a man's self ; the whole world beside being ignorant of his crime ? Do not the fears of another judge gall the heart ? If the judgment above him be feared, an understanding above him discerning their secrets is confessed by those fears ; whence can those horrors arise, if there be not a superior that understands and records the crime ? What perfection of the divine Being can this relate to but omniscience ? What other attribute is to be feared, if God were defective in this ? The condemnation of us by our own hearts, when none

in the world can condemn us, renders it legible, that there is *one greater than our hearts*, in respect of knowledge, who *knows all things*. (1 John iii. 20.) Conscience would be a vain principle, and stingless without this; it would be an easy matter to silence all its accusations, and mockingly laugh in the face of its severest frowns. What need any trouble themselves if none knows their crimes but themselves? Concealed sins, gnawing the conscience, are arguments of God's omniscience of all present and past actions.

CERTAINTY OF A DAY OF JUDGMENT.

Hence, then, will follow *the certainty of a day of judgment*. To what purpose can we imagine this attribute of omniscience so often declared and urged in scripture to our consideration, but in order to a government of our practice, and a future trial? Every perfection of the divine nature hath sent out brighter rays in the world, than this of his infinite knowledge; his power hath been seen in the being of the world, and his wisdom in the order and harmony of the creatures; his grace and mercy hath been plentifully poured out in the mission of a Redeemer; and his justice hath been elevated by the dying groans of the Son of God upon the cross. But hath his omniscience yet met with a glory proportionable to that of his other perfections? All the attributes of God that have appeared in some beautiful glimmerings in the world, wait for a more full manifestation in glory, as the creatures do for the *manifestation of the sons of God*. But especially this, since it hath been less evidenced than others, and as much or more abused than any; it expects therefore a public righting in the eye of the world.

There must therefore be a time of trial for the

public demonstration of this excellency, that it may receive its due honour by a full testimony, that no secrecy can be a shelter from it. As his justice, which consists in giving every one his due, could not be glorified, unless men were called to an account for their actions ; so neither would his omniscience appear in its illustrious colours, without such a manifestation of the secret motions of men's hearts, and of villanies done under lock and key, when none were conscious to them, but the committers of them. Then shall the defaced sins be brought with all their circumstances to every man's memory ; the counsels of men's hearts fled far from their present remembrance ; all the habitual knowledge they had of their own actions, shall by God's knowledge of them be excited to an actual review ; and their works not only made manifest to themselves, but notorious to the world : all the words, thoughts, deeds of men shall be brought forth into the light of their own minds, by the infinite light of God's understanding reflecting on them.

GROUND OF FAITH IN A RESURRECTION.

This perfection in God gives us *ground to believe a resurrection*. Who can think this too hard for his power, since not the least atom of the dust of our bodies can escape his knowledge ?

Since the knowledge of God is infinite, and his providence extensive over the least as well as the greatest parts of the world ; he must needs know the least as well as the greatest of his creatures in their beginning, progress, and dissolution ; all the forms through which the bodies of all creatures roll, the particular instants of time, and the particular place when and where those changes are made, they are all present with him ; and therefore when the

revolution of time allotted by him for the re-union of souls and deceased bodies is come, it cannot be doubted but out of the treasures of his knowledge he can call forth every part of the matter of the bodies of men, from the first to the last man that expired, and strip it of all those forms and figures, which it shall then have, to compact it to be a lodging for that soul which before it entertained; and though the bodies of men have been devoured by wild beasts in the earth, and fish in the sea, and been lodged in the stomachs of barbarous men-eaters, the matter is not lost. There is but little of the food we take that is turned into the substance of our own bodies; that which is not proper for nourishment, which is the greatest part, is separated, and concocted, and rejected; whatsoever objections are made, are answered by this attribute. Nothing hinders a God of infinite knowledge from discerning every particle of the matter, wheresoever it is disposed: and since he hath an eye to discern, and a hand to recollect and unite, what difficulty is there in believing this article of the Christian faith? He that questions this revealed truth of the resurrection of the body, must question God's omniscience as well as his omnipotence and power.

TO BE HONOURED AND ADORED.

What *honourable and adoring thoughts* ought we to have of God for this perfection? Do we not honour a man that is able to predict? Do we not think it a great part of wisdom? Have not all nations regarded such a faculty as a character and a mark of divinity? There is something more ravishing in the knowledge of future things, both to the person that knows them, and the person that hears them, than there is in any other kind of knowledge; whence the greatest pro-

phets have been held in the greatest veneration, and men have thought it a way to glory to divine and predict. Hence it was that the devils and pagan oracles gained so much credit; upon this foundation were they established, and the enemies of mankind owned for a true God; I say, from the prediction of future things, though their oracles were often ambiguous, many times false; yet those poor heathens framed many ingenious excuses, to free their adored gods from the charge of falsity and imposture; and shall we not adore the true God, the God of Israel, the *God blessed for ever*, for this incommunicable property, whereby he flies above the wings of the wind, the understandings of men and cherubims?

Consider how great it is to know the thoughts, and intentions, and works of one man, from the beginning to the end of his life; to fore-know all these before the being of this man, when he was lodged afar off in the loins of his ancestors, yea of Adam; how much greater is it to fore-know and know the thoughts and works of three or four men, of a whole village or neighbourhood? It is greater still to know the imaginations and actions of such a multitude of men as are contained in London, Paris, or Constantinople; how much greater still to know the intentions and practices, the clandestine contrivances of so many millions, that have, do, or shall swarm in all quarters of the world, every person of them having millions of thoughts, desires, designs, affections, and actions!

Let this attribute then make the blessed God honourable in our eyes, and adorable in all our affections; especially since it is an excellence which hath so lately discovered itself, in bringing to light the hidden things of darkness, in opening, and in part confounding the wicked devices of bloody men. Especially let us adore God for it, and admire it in God, since it is so necessary a perfection, that with-

out it the goodness of God had been impotent, and could not have relieved us; for what help can a distressed person expect from a man of the sweetest disposition, and the strongest arm, if the eyes, which should discover the danger, and direct the defence and rescue, were closed up by blindness and darkness? Adore God for this wonderful perfection.

As the consideration of God's omniscience should render him honourable in our eyes, so it should render us vile in our own. God, because of his knowledge, is so far from disdaining his creatures, that his omniscience is a minister to his goodness; no knowledge that we are possessed of, should make us swell with too high a conceit of ourselves, and disdain of others. We have infinitely more of ignorance than knowledge. Let us therefore remember in all our thoughts of God, that he is God, and we are men; and therefore ought to be humble, as becomes men, and ignorant and foolish men; as weak creatures should lie low before an almighty God, and impure creatures before a holy God, false creatures before a faithful God, finite creatures before an infinite God: so should ignorant creatures before an all-knowing God. All God's attributes teach admiring thoughts of God, and low thoughts of ourselves.

THE GROUND OF FAITH IN GOD.

This perfection of God fits him to be a special object of *trust*. If he were forgetful, what comfort could we have in any promise? How could we depend upon him, if he were ignorant of our state? His compassion to pity us, his readiness to relieve us, his power to protect and assist us, would be insignificant, without his omniscience to inform his goodness, and direct the arm of his power.

And the rather, because God knows *the persons of all his own*. He hath in his infinite understanding, the exact number of all the individual persons that belong to him ; *The Lord knoweth them that are his.* (2 Tim. ii. 19.) He knows all things, because he hath created them ; and he knows his people because he hath not only made them, but also chosen them. He could no more choose he knew not what, than he could create he knew not what ; he knows them under a double title ; of creation as creatures, in the common mass of creation ; as new creatures, by a particular act of separation. He cannot be ignorant of them in time, whom he foreknew from eternity ; his knowledge in time is the same he had from eternity ; he foreknew them to whom he intended to give the grace of faith, and he knows them after they believe, because he knows his own act, in bestowing grace upon them, and his own mark and seal wherewith he hath stamped them ; no doubt but he that *calls the stars of heaven by their names*, knows the number of those living stars that sparkle in the firmament of his church. He cannot be ignorant of their persons, when he numbers the hairs of their heads, and hath registered their names in the book of life. As he only had an infinite mercy to make the choice ; so he only hath an infinite understanding to comprehend their persons. We only know the elect of God by a moral assurance in the judgment of charity, when the conversation of men is according to the doctrine of God ; we have not an infallible knowledge of them, we may be often mistaken ; Judas, a devil, may be judged by man for a saint, till he be stripped of his disguise. God only hath an infallible knowledge of them, he knows his own records, and the counterparts in the hearts of his people ; none can counterfeit his seal, nor can any raze it out.

COMFORT IN SECRET PRAYER.

A sigh cannot escape an infinite understanding, though crowded among a mighty multitude of cries from others, or covered with many unwelcome distractions in ourselves, no more than a believing touch from the woman that had the bloody issue, could be concealed from Christ, and be undiscerned from the press of the thronging multitudes: our groans are as audible and intelligible to him as our words, and he knows what is the mind of his own spirit, though expressed in no plainer language than sobs and heavings. Thus David cheers up himself under the neglects of his friends, *Lord, my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee.* (Psalm xxxviii. 9.) Not a groan of a panting spirit shall be lost, till God hath lost his knowledge; not a petition forgotten while God hath a record, nor a tear dried while God hath a bottle to reserve it in. (Psalm lvi. 8.)

COMFORT IN INFIRMITIES.

It is a comfort in all our *infirmities*. As he knows our sins to charge them; so he knows the weakness of our nature to pity us. As his infinite understanding may scare us, because he knows our transgressions, so it may relieve us, because he knows our natural mutability in our first creation: *He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust.* (Psalm ciii. 14.)

How miserable should we be for want of this perfection in the divine nature, whereby God remembers and reflects upon his past act in our first frame, and the mindfulness of our condition excites his compassion to us? Had he lost the knowledge how he first framed us, did he not still remember the mutability

of our nature, as we were formed and stamped in his mint, how much more wretched would our condition be than it is? If his remembrance of our original be one ground of his pity, the sense of his omniscience should be a ground of our comfort, in the stirring of our infirmities; he remembers we were but dust, when he made us; and yet remembers we are but dust, while he preserves and forbears us.

MAKES US HUMBLE.

The consideration of this attribute would make us *humble*. How dejected would a person be, if he were sure all the angels in heaven and men upon earth, perfectly knew his crimes, with all their aggravations? But what is created knowledge to an infinite and just censuring understanding? When we consider that he knows our actions, whereof there are multitudes, and our thoughts, whereof there are millions; that he views all the blessings bestowed upon us; all the injuries we have returned to him; that he exactly knows his own bounty, and our ingratitude; all the idolatry, blasphemy, and secret enmity in every man's heart against him; all tyrannical oppressions, hidden lusts, omissions of necessary duties, violation of plain precepts, every foolish imagination, with all the circumstances of them, and that perfectly in their full anatomy, every mite of unworthiness and wickedness in every circumstance; and add to this his knowledge, the wonders of his patience, which are miraculous upon the score of his omniscience, that he is not as quick in his revenge, as he is in his understanding; but is so far from inflicting punishment, that he continues his former benefits, arms not his justice against us, but solicits our repentance, and waits to be gracious with all this knowledge of our crimes; should not the con-

sideration of this melt our hearts into humiliation before him, and make us earnest in begging forgiveness of him?

Again, do we not all find a worm in our best fruit, a flaw in our soundest duties? Shall any of us vaunt, as if God beheld only the gold, and not any dross; as if he knew one thing only, and not another? If we knew something by ourselves to cheer us, do we not also know something, yea, many things to condemn us, and therefore to humble us? Let the sense of God's infinite knowledge therefore be an incentive and argument for more humiliation in us. If we know enough to render ourselves vile in our own eyes, how much more doth God know to render us vile in his!

ENHANCES OUR PARDON.

The consideration of this attribute is comfortable in *our assurances of, and reflections upon the pardon of sin, or seeking of it.* As God punishes men for sin according to his knowledge of them, which is greater than the knowledge their own consciences have of them; so he pardons according to his knowledge: he pardons not only according to our knowledge but according to his own: he is greater than any man's heart, to condemn for that which a man is at present ignorant of; and greater than our hearts, to pardon that which is not at present visible to us; he knows that which the most watchful conscience cannot survey. If God had not an infinite understanding of us, how could we have a perfect and full pardon from him? it would not stand with his honour to pardon he knew not what. He knows what crimes we have to be pardoned, when we know not all of them ourselves, that stand in need of a gracious remission; his omniscience beholds every sin to charge it upon our Saviour.

VI.—THE WISDOM OF GOD.

DEFINED.

WE have before spoken of the knowledge of God and the infinity of it: the next attribute is the wisdom of God. Most confound the knowledge and wisdom of God together; but there is a manifest distinction between them in our conception.

They are two distinct perfections in God: the *knowledge* of God is his understanding of all things; his *wisdom* is the skilful resolving and acting of all things. And the apostle, in his admiration of him, owns them as distinct, *Oh! the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God.* (Rom. xi. 33.) Knowledge is the foundation of wisdom, and antecedent to it; wisdom the superstructure upon knowledge. They agree in this, that they are both acts of the understanding; but knowledge is the apprehension of a thing, and wisdom is the appointing and ordering of it. Wisdom is the splendour and lustre of knowledge, shining forth in operations, and is an act both of understanding and will; understanding in counselling and contriving, will in resolving and executing: *Counsel* and *will* are linked together. (Ephes. i. 11.)

THE ESSENTIAL WISDOM OF GOD.

There is an *essential* and a *personal* wisdom of God. The essential wisdom is the essence of God; the personal wisdom, is the Son of God. Christ is called *wisdom* by himself. (Luke vii. 35.) The *wisdom of God* by the apostle. (1 Cor. i. 24.) The *wisdom* I speak of belongs to the nature of God, and is considered as a necessary perfection. The personal wisdom is called so, because he opens to us the secrets of God.

THE UNIVERSAL WISDOM OF GOD.

God hath an universal wisdom, because his nature is wise; it is not limited, but hovers over every thing, shines in every being. His executions are as wise as his contrivances. He is wise in his resolves, and wise in his ways; wise in all the varieties of his works of creation, government, redemption. As his will wills all things, and his power effects all things, so his wisdom is the universal director of the motions of his will, and the executions of his power. As his righteousness is the measure of the matter of his actions, so his wisdom is the rule that directs the manner of his actions.

THE WISDOM OF GOD INCOMPREHENSIBLE.

As in his immensity, he is not bounded by the limits of place; in his eternity he is not measured by the minutes of time: in his power, he is not terminated with this or that number of objects; so in his wisdom, he is not confined to this or that par-

ticular mode of working: so that in regard of the reason of his actions, as well as the glory and majesty of his nature, he dwells in *unapproachable light*. (1 Tim. vi. 16.) and whatsoever we understand of his wisdom in creation and providence, is infinitely less than what he is in himself, and his own unbounded nature.

God is not only so wise that nothing more wise can be conceived, but he is more wise than can be imagined; something greater in all his perfections than can be comprehended by any creature. It is a foolish thing therefore to question that which we cannot comprehend: we should adore instead of disputing against it; and take it for granted, that God would not order anything, were it not agreeable to the sovereignty of his wisdom, as well as that of his will. Though the reason of man proceed from the wisdom of God, yet there is more difference between the reason of man, and the wisdom of God, than between the light of the sun, and the feeble shining of the glow-worm; yet we presume to censure the ways of God, as if our purblind reason had a reach above him.

ARGUMENTS TO PROVE HIS WISDOM.

Wisdom and might are his, (Dan. ii. 20); wisdom to contrive, and power to effect. Where should wisdom dwell, but in the head of a deity: and where should power triumph, but in the arm of omnipotence?

If wisdom among men be the knowledge of divine and human things, God must be infinitely wise, since knowledge is most radiant in him; he knows what angels and men do, and infinitely more; what is known by them obscurely, is known by him clearly: what is known by man after it is done, was known

by God before it was wrought. By his wisdom as much as by any thing, he infinitely differs from all his creatures; as by wisdom man differs from a brute. We cannot frame a notion of God without conceiving him infinitely wise. We should render him very inconsiderable to imagine him furnished with an infinite knowledge, and not have an infinite wisdom to make use of that knowledge; or to fancy him with a mighty power, destitute of prudence. Knowledge without prudence is an eye without motion; and power without discretion is an arm without a head; a hand to act without understanding to contrive and model; strength to act without reason to know how to act: it would be a miserable notion of a God to fancy him with a brutish and unguided power.

A man is not a perfect man without reason; how can God, without it, be an infinitely perfect God. Wisdom is the most eminent of all virtues; all the other perfections of God without this, would be as a body without an eye, a soul without understanding: A Christian's graces want their lustre, when they are destitute of the guidance of wisdom; mercy is feebleness, and justice cruelty, patience timorousness, and courage madness, without the conduct of wisdom; so the patience of God would be cowardice, his power oppression, his justice tyranny, without wisdom as the spring, and holiness as the rule. No attribute of God could shine with due lustre and brightness without it. Power is a great perfection, but wisdom a greater.

The creatures working for an end, without their own knowledge, *demonstrate the wisdom of God that guides them.* All things in the world work for some end; the ends are unknown to them, though many of their ends are visible to us. As there was some prime cause, which by his power inspired them with their several instincts, so there must be some su-

preme wisdom, which moves and guides them to their end. As their being manifests his power that endowed them, so the acting according to the rules of their nature, which they themselves understand not, manifests his wisdom in directing them. Every thing that acts for an end, must know that end, or be directed by another to attain that end. The arrow does not know who shoots it, or to what end it is shot, or what mark is aimed at ; but the archer that puts it in, and darts it out of the bow, knows. A watch hath a regular motion, but neither the spring nor the wheels that move, know the end of their motion ; no man will judge wisdom to be in the watch, but in the artificer that disposed the wheels and spring, by a joint combination to produce such a motion for such an end. Does either the sun that enlivens the earth, or the earth that travails with the plant, know what plant it produceth in such a soil, what temper it should be of, what fruit it should bear, and what should be its colour ? What plant knows its own medicinal qualities, its own beautiful flowers, and for what use they are ordained ? When it strikes up its head from the earth, does it know what proportion of them there will be ? Yet it produces all these things in a state of ignorance. The sun warms the earth, concocts the humours, excites the virtue of it, and cherishes the seeds, which are cast into her lap, yet all unknown to the sun or the earth.

Since therefore that nature, that is the immediate cause of those things, does not understand its own quality, nor operation, nor the end of its action, that which thus directs them must be conceived to have an infinite wisdom. When things act by a rule they know not, and move for an end they understand not, and yet work harmoniously together for one end, of which all of them are ignorant, it raises our minds to acknowledge the wisdom of that supreme

cause, that ranged all these inferior causes in their order, and imprinted upon them the laws of their motion, according to the ideas in his own mind, who orders the rule by which they act, and the end for which they act, and directs every motion according to their several natures, and therefore is possessed with infinite wisdom in his own nature.

DISPLAYED IN ALL THINGS.

How much may we see of *the perfection of God in every thing* that presents itself to our eye! And how should we be convinced of our unworthy neglect of ascending to him with reverent and admiring thoughts, upon the prospect of the creatures? What dull scholars are we, when every creature is our teacher, every part of the creature affords lively instruction! Those things that we tread under our feet, if used by us according to the full design of their creation, would afford rich matter, not only for our heads, but our hearts. As grace does not destroy nature, but elevate it, so neither should the fresher and fuller discoveries of divine wisdom in redemption, deface our thoughts of his wisdom in creation. Though the greater light of the sun obscures the lesser sparkling of the stars, yet it gives way in the night to the discovery of them, that God may be seen, known, and considered in all his works of wonder, and miracles of nature. No part of scripture is more spiritual than the Psalms; none filled with clearer discoveries of Christ in the Old Testament; yet how often do the penmen consider the creation of God! *My meditation of him shall be sweet.* (Psalm civ. 34.) When? Why, after a short history of the goodness and wisdom of God in the frame of the world, and the species of the creatures.

DISPLAYED IN REDEMPTION.

The wisdom of God wonderfully appears in *redemption*. His wisdom in creation delights the eye and understanding; his wisdom in government, no less a curious observer of the links and concatenation of the means; but his wisdom in redemption raises the mind to greater astonishment. The works of creation are the *footsteps* of his wisdom; the work of redemption is the *face* of his wisdom: a man is better known by the features of his face than by the prints of his feet. We with *open face*, or a *revealed face*, beholding the glory of the Lord. (2 Cor. iii. 18.)

The *greatest different interests are reconciled*, justice in punishing, and mercy in pardoning. For man had broken the law, and plunged himself into a gulf of misery; the sword of vengeance was unsheathed by justice, for the punishment of the criminal; the bowels of compassion were stirred by mercy, for the rescue of the miserable. Justice severely beholds the sin, and mercy compassionately reflects upon the misery. Two different claims are entered by those concerned attributes: justice votes for destruction, and mercy votes for salvation. Justice would draw the sword, and drench it in the blood of the offender; mercy would draw the sword, and turn it from the breast of the sinner; justice would edge it, and mercy would blunt it. The arguments are strong on both sides.

Justice pleads, 'I arraign before the tribunal a rebel, who was the glorious work of thy hands, the centre of thy rich goodness, and a counterpart of thy own image; he is indeed miserable, whereby to excite thy compassion; but he is not miserable without being criminal. Thou didst create him in a state and with ability to be otherwise; the riches of thy

bounty aggravate the blackness of his crime. He is a rebel not by necessity but *will*. What constraint was there upon him to listen to the counsels of the enemy of God? What force could there be upon him, since it is without the compass of any creature to work upon, or constrain the will? Nothing of ignorance can excuse him; the law was not ambiguously expressed, but in plain words, both as to precept and penalty, it was written in his nature in legible characters. Had he received any disgust from thee after his creation, it would not excuse his apostacy, since, as a sovereign, thou wert not obliged to thy creature. Thou hadst provided all things richly for him; he was crowned with glory and honour; thy infinite power had bestowed upon him an habitation richly furnished, and varieties of servants to attend him. Whatever he viewed without or within himself, were several marks of thy divine bounty, to engage him to obedience. Had there been some reason of any disgust, it could not have balanced that kindness which had so much reason to oblige him; however, he had received no courtesy from the fallen angel to oblige him to turn into his camp. 'Was it not enough that one of thy creatures would have stripped thee of the glory of heaven, but this also must deprive thee of thy glory upon earth, which was due from him to thee as his Creator? Can he charge the difficulty of the command? No; it was rather below than above his strength. He might rather complain that it was no higher, whereby his obedience and gratitude might have a larger scope, and a more spacious field to move in, than a precept so light, so easy as to abstain from one fruit in the garden.'

'What excuse can he have, that would prefer the gratification of his sense before the dictates of his reason, and the obligations of his creation? The law thou didst set him, was righteous and reason-

able, and shall righteousness and reason be rejected by the supreme and infallible reason, because the rebellious creature hath trampled upon it? What! Must God abrogate his holy law, because the creature hath slighted it? What reflection will this be upon the wisdom that enacted it; and upon the equity of the command and sanction of it? Either man must suffer, or the holy law be expunged, and for ever out of date. And is it not better, man should eternally smart under his crime, than any dishonourable reflections of unrighteousness be cast upon the law, and of folly and want of foresight upon the lawgiver? Not to punish, would be to approve the devil's lie, and justify the creature's revolt. It would be a condemnation of thy own law as unrighteous, and a sentencing thy own wisdom as imprudent. Better man should for ever bear the punishment of his offence, than God bear the dishonour of his attributes; better man should be miserable, than God should be unrighteous, unwise, false, and tamely bear the denial of his sovereignty.

‘ But what advantage would it be to gratify mercy by pardoning the malefactor? Besides the irreparable dishonour to the law, the falsifying thy veracity in not executing the denounced threatening, he would receive encouragement by such grace to spurn more at thy sovereignty, and oppose thy holiness by running on in a course of sin with hopes of impunity. If the creature be restored, it cannot be expected that he that hath fared so well after the breach of it, should be very careful of a future observance. His easy readmission would abet him in the repetition of his offence, and thou shalt soon find him cast off all moral dependance on thee. Shall he be restored without any condition or covenant; he is a creature not to be governed without a law, and a law is not to be enacted without a penalty. What future regard will he have to thy precept, or what

fear will he have of thy threatening, if his crime be so lightly passed over? Is it the stability of thy word! What reason will he have to give credit to that which he hath found already disregarded by thyself? The truth of future threatenings will be of no force with him who hath experienced thy laying it aside in the former. It is necessary, therefore, that the rebellious creature should be punished for the preservation of the honour of the law, and the honour of the lawgiver, with all those perfections that are united in the composure of it.'—But here,

Mercy appears, and offers her plea on behalf of the arraigned sinner, 'It is true indeed the sin of man wants not its aggravations. He hath slighted thy goodness and accepted thy enemy as his counsellor; but it was not a pure act of his own, as the devil's revolt was. He had a tempter, and the devil had none: he had, I acknowledge, an understanding to know thy will, and a power to obey it; yet he was mutable and had a capacity to fall. It was no difficult task that was set him, nor a hard yoke that was laid upon him; yet he had a brutish part, as well as a rational, and sense as well as soul; whereas the fallen angel was a pure intellectual spirit. Did God create the world to suffer an eternal dishonour, in letting himself be outwitted by Satan, and his work wrested out of his hands? Shall the work of eternal counsel presently sink into irreparable destruction, and the honour of an almighty and wise work be lost in the ruin of the creature? This would seem contrary to the nature of thy goodness, to make man only to render him miserable; to design him in his creation for the service of the devil, and not for the service of his Creator. What else could be the issue, if the chief work of thy hand, defaced presently after the erecting, should for ever remain in this marred condition; what can be expected upon

the continuance of his misery, but a perpetual hatred and enmity of thy creature against thee? Did God in creation design his being hated, or his being loved by his creature? Shall God make a holy law, and have no obedience to that law from that creature whom it was made to govern? Shall the curious workmanship of God, and the excellent engravings of the law of nature in his heart, be so soon defaced, and remain in that blotted condition for ever?’

‘This fall thou couldst not but in thy infinite knowledge foresee; why hadst thou goodness then to create him in integrity, if thou wouldst not have mercy to pity him in misery? Shall thy enemy for ever trample upon the honour of thy work, and triumph over thy glory, and applaud himself in the success of his subtilty? Shall thy creature only passively glorify thee as an avenger, and not actively as a Saviour? Am not I a perfection of thy nature as well as justice? Shall justice engross all, and I never come into view? It is resolved already, that the fallen angels shall have no interest in my plea; and I have now less reason than before to plead for them: they fell with a full consent of will, without any motion from another; and not content with their own apostacy, they envy thee, and thy glory upon earth as well as in heaven, and have drawn into their party the best part of the creation below: shall Satan plunge the whole creation in the same irreparable ruin with himself; if the creature be restored, will he contract a boldness in sin by impunity? Hast thou not grace to render him ingenuous in obedience, as well as compassion to recover him from misery? What will hinder but that such grace, which hath established the standing angels, may establish this recovered creature? If I am utterly excluded from exercising myself on men, as I have been from devils, a whole species is lost; nay, I can never expect to appear upon the stage: if thou

wilt quite ruin him by justice, and create another world and another man, if he stand, thy bounty will be eminent, yet there is no room for mercy to act unless by the commission of sin he exposeth himself to misery; and if sin enter into another world, I have little hopes to be heard then if I am rejected now. Worlds will be perpetually created by goodness, wisdom, and power: sin entering into these worlds, will be perpetually punished by justice; and mercy, which is a perfection of thy nature, must lie wrapt up in eternal darkness. Take occasion now therefore to expose me to the knowledge of thy creatures, since without misery mercy can never set foot into the world.'

Mercy pleads, if man be ruined, the creation is in vain; justice pleads, if man be not sentenced the law is in vain; truth supports justice, and grace abets mercy. What shall be done in this seeming contradiction? Mercy is not manifested if man be not pardoned; justice will complain if man be not punished; therefore an *expedient is found out by the wisdom of God to answer these demands*, and adjust the differences between them. The wisdom of God answers, I will satisfy your pleas. The pleas of justice shall be satisfied in punishing, and the pleas of mercy shall be received in pardoning. Justice shall not complain for want of punishment, nor mercy for want of compassion. I will have an infinite sacrifice to content justice; and the virtue and fruit of that sacrifice shall delight mercy. Here shall justice have punishment to accept, and mercy shall have pardon to bestow. The rights of both are preserved, and the demands of both amicably accorded in punishment and pardon, by transferring the punishment of our crimes upon a surety, exacting a recompense from his blood by justice, and conferring life and salvation upon us by mercy without the expence of one drop of our own. Thus is justice

satisfied in its severities, and mercy in its indulgences. The riches of grace are entwined with the terrors of wrath. The glories of mercy are wound about the flaming sword of justice, and the sword of justice protects and secures the glories of mercy. Thus is God righteous without being cruel, and merciful without being unjust; his righteousness inviolable, and the world recoverable. Thus is resplendent mercy brought forth in the midst of all the wrath threatened to the offender.

Thus is the admirable temperament found out by the wisdom of God. His justice is honoured in the sufferings of man's surety; and his mercy is honoured in the application of the propitiation to the offender. *Being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.* (Rom. iii. 24, 25.) Had we in our persons been sacrifices to justice, mercy had for ever been unknown; had we been solely fostered by mercy, justice had for ever been secluded; had we, being guilty, been absolved, mercy might have rejoiced, and justice might have complained; had we been solely punished, justice would have triumphed, and mercy grieved. But by this medium of redemption, neither hath ground of complaint: justice hath nothing to charge, when the punishment is inflicted; mercy hath whereof to boast when the surety is accepted. The debt of the sinner is transferred upon the surety that the merit of the surety may be conferred upon the sinner; so that God now deals with our sins in a way of consuming justice, and in our persons in a way of relieving mercy. It is highly better, and more glorious than if the claim of one had been granted with the exclusion of the demand of the other: it had then been either an unrighteous



mercy or a merciless justice; it is now a righteous mercy and a merciful justice.

DISPLAYED IN THE FRUITS OF REDEMPTION.

The wisdom of God is apparent in the condition he hath settled for the enjoying the fruits of redemption, and this is faith, a wise and reasonable condition: and the concomitants of it.

It is a condition suited to *man's lapsed state and God's glory*. Innocence is not required here, that had been a condition impossible in its own nature after the fall: the rejecting of mercy is now only condemning where mercy is proposed: had the condition of perfection in works been required, it had rather been a condemnation than redemption. Works are not demanded whereby the creature might ascribe any thing to himself; but a condition which continues in man a sense of his apostacy, abates all aspiring pride, and makes the reward of grace not of debt: a condition whereby mercy is owned and the creature emptied; flesh silenced in the dust, and God set upon his throne of grace and authority; the creature brought to the lowest debasement and divine glory raised to the highest pitch. The creature is brought to acknowledge mercy and seal to justice, to own the holiness of God in the hatred of sin, the justice of God in the punishment of sin, and the mercy of God in the pardoning of sin, a condition that despoils nature of all its pretended excellence: beats down the glory of man at the foot of God. (1 Cor. i. 29, 31.) It subjects the reason and will of man to the wisdom and authority of God; it brings the creature to an unreserved submission and entire resignation. God is made the sovereign cause of all; the creature continued in his emptiness, and reduced to a greater dependance upon

God than by creation, depending upon him for a constant influx for an entire happiness. A condition that renders God glorious in the creature, and the fallen creature happy in God: God glorious in his condescension to man, and man happy in his emptiness before God. Faith is made the condition of man's recovery, that the lofty looks of man might be humbled and the *haughtiness of man be bowed down*. (Isaiah ii. 11.) That every towering imagination might be levelled. (2 Cor. x. 5.) Man must have all from without; he must not live upon himself, but upon another's allowance. He must stand to the provision of God, and be a perpetual suitor at his gates.

It is a condition *opposite to that which was the cause of the fall*. We fell from God by unbelief of the threatening, he recovers us by belief of the promise; by unbelief we laid the foundation of God's dishonour, by faith therefore God exalts the glory of his free grace. We lost ourselves by a desire of self-dependance, and our return is ordered by a way of self-emptiness. It is reasonable we should be restored in a way contrary to that whereby we fell: we sinned by a refusal of cleaving to God, it is a part of divine wisdom to restore us in a denial of our own righteousness and strength. 'Man having sinned by pride, the wisdom of God humbles him at the very root of the tree of knowledge, and makes him deny his own understanding, and submit to faith, or else for ever to lose his desired felicity.'

GUILT OF DESPISING DIVINE WISDOM.

The wisdom of God is affronted and invaded in *murmuring* and impatience. One demands a reason why he hath this or that cross? Why he hath been deprived of such a comfort, lost such a venture,

languishes under such a sickness, is tormented with such pains, oppressed by tyrannical neighbours, is unsuccessful in such designs? In these and such like the wisdom of God is questioned and defamed. All impatience is a suspicion, if not condemnation, of the prudence of God's methods, and would make human feebleness and folly the rule of God's dealing with his creatures. This is presuming to instruct God, and reproving him for unreasonableness in his proceedings, when his dealings with us do not exactly answer our fancies and wishes; as if God, who made the world in wisdom, wanted skill for the management of his creatures in it. *Shall he that contends with the Almighty instruct him? He that reproveth God, let him answer it.* (Job xl. 2.) We that are not wise enough to know ourselves, and what is needful for us, presume to have wit enough to guide God in his dealing with us. The wisdom of God rendered Job more useful to the world by his afflictions, in making him a pattern of patience, than if he had continued him in a confluence of all worldly comforts, wherein he had been beneficial only in communicating his morsels to his poor neighbours. All murmuring is charging error upon unerring wisdom.

THE SOURCE OF OUR COMFORT.

If God hath an infinite wisdom, to conduct us in our affairs, rectify us in our mistakes, and assist us in our straits, we have, in that wisdom, an inexhaustible source of *comfort*. It is an inestimable privilege to have a God in covenant with us; so wise to communicate all good, and to prevent all evil; who hath infinite ways to bring to pass his gracious intentions towards us.

Comfort in all *straits and afflictions*. There is a

wisdom in inflicting them, and a wisdom in removing them. He is wise to suit his medicines to the humour of our disease, though he does not to the humour of our wills ; he cannot mistake the nature of our distemper, or the virtue of his own remedy. Like a skilful physician, he sometimes prescribes bitter potions, and sometimes cheering cordials, according to the strength of the malady and necessity of the patient, to reduce him to health. As nothing comes from him but what is for our good, so nothing is acted by him in a rash and temerarious way. His wisdom is as infinite as his goodness ; and as exact in managing as his goodness is plentiful in streaming out to us. He understands our griefs, weighs our necessities, and no remedies are beyond the reach of his contrivance. When our feeble wits are bewildered in a maze, and at the end of their line for relief, the remedies unknown to us are not unknown to God. When we know not how to prevent a danger, the wise God hath a thousand blocks to lay in the way. When we know not how to free ourselves from an oppressive evil, he hath a thousand ways of relief.

He knows how to *time* our crosses, and his own blessings. The heart of a wise God, as well as the heart of a wise man, *discerns both time and judgment*. (Eccles. viii. 5.) There is as much judgment in sending them, as judgment in removing them. How comfortable is it to think that our distresses, as well as our deliverances, are the fruits of infinite wisdom ? Nothing is done by him too soon or too slow ; but in the true point of time, with all its due circumstances, most conveniently for his glory and our good. How wise is God, to bring the glory of our salvation out of the depths of a seeming ruin, and make the evils of affliction subservient to the good of the afflicted ?

MEDITATION ON THE WISDOM OF GOD.

The meditation of God's wisdom in the creatures, is in part a *beginning of heaven upon earth*. No doubt but there will be a perfect opening of the model of divine wisdom. Heaven will clear what is now obscure, and fully explain what seems at present intricate. *In his light shall we see light*, (Psalm xxxvi. 9); all the light in creation, government, and redemption. The wisdom of God in the new heavens, and the new earth, would be to little purpose, if that also were not to be regarded by the inhabitants of them. As the saints are to be restored to the state of Adam, and higher; so they are to be restored to the employment of Adam, and higher: but his employment, was to behold God in the creatures. The world was so soon depraved, that God had but little joy in, and man but little knowledge of, his works.

And since the wisdom of God in creation is so little seen by our ignorance here, would not God lose much of the glory of it, if the glorified souls should lose the understanding of it above; when their darkness shall be expelled, and their advantages improved; when the light that Adam lost, shall be fully restored, and with a greater clearness; when the creature shall be restored to its true end, and reason to its true perfection; when the fountains of the depths of nature and government shall be opened, knowledge shall increase, and, according to the increase of our knowledge, shall the admiration of divine wisdom increase also. The wisdom of God in creation, was not surely intended to lie wholly unobserved in the greatest part of it; but since there was so little time for the full observation of it, there will be a time wherein the wisdom of God shall enjoy

a resurrection, and be fully contemplated by his understanding and glorified creature.

Study and admire the wisdom of God in redemption. This is the duty of all Christians. We are not called to understand the great depths of philosophy; we are not called to skill in the intricacies of civil government, or to understand all the methods of physic: but we are called to be Christians, that is, students of divine evangelical wisdom. There are first principles to be learned; but those principles are not to be rested in, without a further progress. *Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on to perfection.* (Heb. vi. 1.) Duties must be practised, but knowledge is not to be neglected. The study of gospel mysteries, the harmony of divine truths, the sparkling of divine wisdom, in their mutual combination to the great ends of God's glory and man's salvation, is an incentive to duty, a spur to worship, and particularly to the greatest and highest part of worship, that part which shall remain in heaven; the admiration and praise of God, and delight in him. If we acquaint not ourselves with the impressions of the glory of divine wisdom in it, we shall not much regard it as worthy our observance in that duty.

VII.—THE POWER OF GOD.

DEFINED.

INFINITE and incomprehensible power pertains to the nature of God, and is expressed in part in his works: or, though there be a mighty expression of divine power in his works, yet an incomprehensible power pertains to his nature. *The thunder of his power, who can understand?*

His power shines in all his works, as well as his wisdom. *Twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God.* (Psalm lxii. 11.) That is, it is a certain and undoubted truth, that power is essential to the divine nature. It is true, mercy is essential, justice is essential; but power more apparently essential, because no acts of mercy, or justice, or wisdom, can be exercised by him without power; the repetition of a thing confirms the certainty of it.

Indeed we can have no conception of God, if we conceive him not most powerful, as well as most wise. He is not a God, that cannot do what he will, and perform all his pleasure. If we imagine him restrained in his power, we imagine him limited in his essence. As he hath an infinite knowledge to know what is possible, he cannot be without an infinite power to do what is possible. As he hath a will to resolve what he sees good, so he cannot want a power to effect what he sees good to decree. As

the essence of a creature cannot be conceived without that activity that belongs to his nature ; as when you conceive fire, you cannot conceive it without a power of burning and warming ; and when you conceive water, you cannot conceive it without a power of moistening and cleansing ; so you cannot conceive an infinite essence without an infinite power of activity.

IN HIS GRACIOUS AND JUDICIOUS GOVERNMENT.

In the deliverance of his church, he is the *strength of Israel*, and hath protected his little flock in the midst of wolves ; and maintained their standing, when the strongest kingdoms have sunk, and the best united states have been broken in pieces. When judgments have ravaged countries and torn up the mighty, as a tempestuous wind hath often done the tallest trees, which seemed to threaten heaven with their tops, and dare the storm with the depth of their roots, when yet the vine and rose bushes have stood firm, and been seen in their beauty next morning ; the state of the church hath out-lived the most flourishing monarchies ; when there hath been a mighty knot of adversaries combined against her : when the bulls of Bashan have pushed her, and the whole tribe of the dragon have sharpened their weapons, and edged their malice ; when the voice was strong, and the hopes high to raze her foundation even with the ground ; when hell hath roared ; when the wit of the world hath contrived, and the strength of the world hath attempted her ruin ; when decrees have been passed against her, and the powers of the world armed for the execution of them ; when her friends have drooped and have been concealed in corners ; when there was no eye to pity, and no hand to assist, then help hath come from heaven ; her

enemies have been defeated, kings have brought gifts to her and reared her; tears have been wiped off her cheeks, and her very enemies, by an unseen power, have been forced to court her, whom before they would have devoured quick. The devil and his armies have fled into their den, and the church hath triumphed when she hath been upon the brink of ruin.

IN THE PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL.

How much the Gentiles were overgrown with base and unworthy lusts at the time of the publication of the gospel, needs no other memento than the apostle's discourse, Rom. i. As there was no error but prevailed upon their minds, so there was no brutish affection but was wedded to their hearts. The doctrine proposed to them was not easy; it flattered not the sense, but checked the stream of nature. It thundered down those three great engines whereby the devil had subdued the world to himself, *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life*: not only the most sordid affections of the flesh, but the more refined gratifications of the mind; it stripped nature both of devil and man; of what was commonly esteemed great and virtuous. That which was the root of their fame, and the satisfaction of their ambition, was struck at by this axe of the gospel. The first article of it ordered them to deny themselves, not to presume upon their own worth: to lay their understandings and wills at the foot of the cross, and resign them up to one newly crucified at Jerusalem; honours and wealth were to be despised, flesh to be tamed, the cross to be borne, enemies to be loved, revenge not to be satisfied, blood to be spilt, and torments to be endured for the honour of one they never saw, nor ever before heard

of ; who was preached with the circumstances of a shameful death, enough to affright them from the entertainment ; and the report of a resurrection and glorious ascension were things never heard of by them before, and unknown in the world, that would not easily enter into the belief of men ; the cross, disgrace, self-denial, were only discoursed of in order to the attainment of an invisible world, and an unseen reward which none of their predecessors ever returned to acquaint them with ; a patient death, contrary to the pride of nature, was published as the way to happiness and a blessed immortality ; the dearest lusts were to be pierced to death for the honour of this new Lord. Other religions brought wealth and honour ; this struck them off from such expectations, and presented them with no promise of any thing in this life, but a prospect of misery ; except those inward consolations to which before they had been utter strangers, and had never experimented. It made them to depend not upon themselves, but upon the sole grace of God. It decried all natural, all moral idolatry, things as dear to men as the apple of their eyes. It despoiled them of whatsoever the mind, will, and affections of men naturally lay claim to, and glory in. It pulled self up by the roots, unmanned carnal man, and debased the principle of honour and self-satisfaction, which the world counted at that time noble and brave. In a word, it took them off from themselves, to act like creatures of God's framing ; to know no more than he would admit them, and do no more than he did command them. How difficult must it needs be to reduce men, that placed all their happiness in the pleasures of this life, from their pompous idolatry and brutish affections, to this mortifying religion ? What might the world say : Here is a doctrine will render us a company of puling animals ; farewell generosity ; bravery, sense of honour, courage in en-



larging the bounds of our country, for an ardent charity to the bitterest of our enemies. Here is a religion will rust our swords, canker our arms, dispirit what we have hitherto called virtue, and annihilate what hath been esteemed worthy and comely among mankind. Must we change conquest for suffering, the increase of our reputation for self-denial, the natural sentiment of self-preservation for affecting a dreadful death? How impossible was it that a crucified Lord, and a crucifying doctrine, should be received in the world without the mighty operation of a divine power upon the hearts of men? And in this also the almighty power of God did notably shine forth.

IN TURNING THE HEARTS OF MEN.

The power of God is conspicuous in turning the heart of man *against the strength of the inclinations of nature*. In the forming of man of the dust of the ground, as the matter contributed nothing to the action whereby God formed it, so it had no principle of resistance contrary to the design of God: but in converting the heart, there is not only wanting a principle of assistance from him in this work, but the whole strength of corrupt nature is alarmed to combat against the power of his grace. When the gospel is presented, the understanding is not only ignorant of it, but the will perverse against it; the one does not relish, and the other does not esteem, the excellence of the object. The carnal wisdom in the mind contrives against it, and the rebellious will puts the orders in execution against the counsel of God, which requires the invincible power of God to enlighten the dark mind, to know what it slights; and the fierce will, to embrace what it loathes. The stream of nature cannot be turned, but by a power

above nature : it is not all the created power in heaven and earth can change a swine into a man; or a venomous toad into a holy illustrious angel: Yet this work is not so great in some respect, as the stilling the fierceness of nature, the silencing the swelling waves in the heart, and the casting out those brutish affections which are born and grow up with us. There would be no, or far less; resistance in a mere animal to be changed into a creature of a higher rank, than there is in a natural man to be turned into a serious Christian.

Nature renders a man too feeble and indisposed and custom renders a man more weak and unwilling to change his hue. (Jer. xiii. 23.) To dispossess man then of his self-esteem and self-excellency ; to make room for God in the heart, where there was none but for sin, as dear to him as himself ; to hurl down the pride of nature ; to make stout imaginations stoop to the cross ; to make desires of self-advancement sink under a zeal for the glorifying of God, and an over-ruling design for his honour, is not to be ascribed to any, but an out-stretched arm wielding the *sword of the spirit*. To have a heart full of the fear of God, that was just before filled with a contempt of him ; to have a sense of his power, an eye to his glory, admiring thoughts of his wisdom, a faith in his truth, that had lower thoughts of him and all his perfection, than he had of a creature : to have a hatred of his habitual lusts, that had brought him in much sensitive pleasure ; to loathe them as much as he loved them ; to cherish the duties he hated ; to live by faith in, and obedience to the Redeemer, who was before so heartily under the conduct of Satan and self ; to chase the acts of sin from his members, and the pleasing thoughts of sin from his mind ; to make a stout wretch willingly fall down, crawl upon the ground, and adore that Saviour whom before he out-dared, is a triumphant act of in-

a power that can *subdue all things to itself*, and break those multitudes of locks and bolts that were on us, the manner of conversion shews no less the power of God. There is not only a resistible force used in it, but an agreeable sweetness. The power is so serious, that nothing can vanquish it; and so soft, that none did ever complain of it. The mighty virtue displays itself invincibly, yet without constraint; compelling the will, without offering violence to it, and making it cease to be will: not breaking it, but changing it; not dragging it, but ruling it; making will where before it nilled; reversing the corrupt nature of the will, without invading the created nature and rights of the faculty; working in us against the physical nature of the flesh, but working *to will*. (Phil. ii. 13.) This work, therefore called creation, a resurrection, to shew irresistible power; it is called illumination, pardon, drawing, to shew the suitableness of its way to the nature of the human faculties: it is a *winning with cords*, which testifies an invincible strength; but with cords of love, which testifies a gentle conquest. It is hard to determine whether it is more powerful than sweet, or more sweet than powerful. It is no mean part of the power of God to unite together victory and pleasure; to give a victory as delightful as strong, as pleasing to the conqueror as it is sharp to the sinner.

IN THE APPLICATION OF REDEMPTION.

A man is no more able to apply to himself any degree of comfort under the sense of sin, than he is able to convert himself, and turn the proposals of the Gospel into the gracious affections in his heart. To receive the joy of salvation, is in David's judgment an

act of sovereign power, equal to that of *creating a clean heart*. (Psalm li. 10, 12.) Alas, it is a state like to that of death; as infinite power can only raise from natural death, so from spiritual death, also from a comfortless death. *In his favour there is life*; in the want of his favour is death. The power of God hath so placed light in the sun, that all creatures in the world, all the torches upon earth kindled together cannot make it day if that doth not rise; so all the angels in heaven and men upon earth, are not competent surgeons for a wounded spirit. The cure of our spiritual diseases, and the pouring in balm, is an act of sovereign creative power. It is more visible in silencing a tempestuous conscience, than the power of our Saviour was in the stilling the stormy winds and the roaring waves. As none but infinite power can remove the guilt of sin, so none but infinite power can remove the despairing sense of it.

IN PRESERVATION TO ETERNAL LIFE.

This power is evident in the *preserving* grace. As the providence of God is a manifestation of his power in a continued creation; so the preservation of grace is a manifestation of his power in a regeneration. To keep a nation under the yoke, is an act of the same power that subdued it. It is this that strengthens men in suffering against the fury of hell, (Colos. i. 13); it is this that keeps them from falling against the force of hell. (John x. 29.) His strength abates and moderates the violence of temptations; his staff sustains his people under them; his might defeats the power of Satan, and bruises him under a believer's feet. The counterworkings of indwelling corruption; the reluctances of the flesh against the breathings of the Spirit; the fallacy

of the senses and the roivings of the mind, have ability quickly to stifle and extinguish grace, if it were not maintained by that powerful blast that first inbreathed it. No less power is seen in perfecting it, than was in planting it; no less in fulfilling the work of faith, than in ingrafting the word of faith. (2 Peter i. 3; 2 Thess. i. 11.)

The apostle well understood the necessity and efficacy of it in the preservation of faith, as well as in the first infusion, when he expresses himself in those terms of a greatness or hyperbole of power, his mighty *power*, or the *power of his might*. (Eph. i. 19.) The salvation he bestows, and the strength whereby he effects it, are joined together in the prophet's song, *The Lord is my strength and my salvation*, (Isaiah xii. 2); and indeed, God more magnifies his power in continuing a believer in the world, a weak and half-rigged vessel, in the midst of so many sands whereon it might split; so many rocks whereon it might dash; so many corruptions within, and so many temptations without; than if he immediately transported him to heaven, and clothed him with a perfectly sanctified nature.

To conclude, what is there then in the world which is destitute of notices of divine power? Every creature affords us the lesson; all acts of divine government are the marks of it. Look into the word, and the manner of its propagation instructs us in it; your changed natures, your pardoned guilt, your shining comfort, your quelled corruptions, the standing of your staggering graces, are sufficient to preserve a sense, and prevent forgetfulness of this great attribute, so necessary for your support, and conducing so much to your comfort.

THE COMFORT OF THIS ATTRIBUTE.

This perfection is made over to believers in the covenant, as well as any other attribute; *I am the Lord your God*; therefore that power which is as essential to the godhead as any other perfection of his nature, is in the rights and extent of it assured to you. Nay, we may not say it is made over more than any other, because it is that which animates every other perfection, and is the spirit that gives them motion and appearance in the world. If God had expressed himself in particular, as *I am a true God, a wise God, a loving God, a righteous God, I am yours*, what would all or any of these have signified, unless the other also had been implied, as, *I am an Almighty God, I am your God?* In God's making over himself in any particular attribute, this of his power is included in every one, without which all his other grants would be insignificant. It is a comfort that power is in the hand of God; it can never be better placed, for he can never use his power to injure his confiding creature. If it were in our own hands, we might use it to injure ourselves. It is a power in the hands of an indulgent father, not a hard-hearted tyrant. It is a just power, *His right hand is full of righteousness*, (Psalm xlviii. 10,) because of his righteousness he can never use it ill, and because of his wisdom he can never use it unseasonably. Men that have strength often misplace the actings of it, because of their folly; and sometimes employ it to base ends, because of their wickedness; but this power in God is always awakened by goodness and conducted by wisdom; it is never exercised by self-will and passion, but according to the immutable rule of his own nature, which is righteousness. How comfortable is it to think

that you have a God that can do what he pleases; nothing so difficult but he can effect, nothing so strong but he can over-rule. You need not dread men, since you have one to restrain them; nor fear devils, since you have one to chain them. No creature but is acted by this power; no creature but must fall, upon the withdrawing of his power. It was not all laid out in creation; it is not weakened by his preservation of things; he yet hath a fulness of power, and a residue of spirit. For whom should that eternal *arms of the Lord* be displayed, and that incomprehensible *thunder of his power* be shot out, but for those for whose sake and for whose comfort it is revealed in his word?

MEDITATION ON THE POWER OF GOD.

Meditate on this power of God, and press it often upon your minds. We conclude many things of God that we do not practically enjoy the comfort of, for want of deep thoughts of it, and frequent inspection into it. We believe God to be true, yet distrust him; we acknowledge him powerful, yet fear the motion of every straw. Many truths, though assented to in our understanding, are kept under darkness by corrupt affections, and have not their due influence, because they are not brought forth into the open air of our souls by meditation. If we will but search our hearts, we shall find it is the power of God we often doubt of.

The belief of God's power is one of the first steps to all religion; without settled thoughts of it, we cannot pray with animation and faith; for the obtaining the mercies we want, or averting the evils we fear; we should not love him, unless we are persuaded he hath a power to bless us; nor fear him, unless we were persuaded of his power to punish us. The frequent thoughts of this would render our faith

more stable, and our hopes more steadfast ; it would make us more feeble to sin, and more careful to obey.

Why doth he reveal himself so often under the title of Almighty, and press it upon us, but that we should press it upon ourselves? And shall we be forgetful of that, which every thing about us, every thing within us, is a mark of? How come we by a power of seeing and hearing, a faculty and act of understanding and will, but by this power framing us, this power assisting us? What though the thunder of his power cannot be understood, no more can any other perfection of his nature; shall we therefore seldom think of it? The sea cannot be fathomed, yet the merchant excuses not himself from sailing upon the surface of it. We cannot glorify God, without due consideration of this attribute; for his power is his glory as much as any other, and called both by the name of glory, (Rom. iii. 4, speaking of Christ's resurrection by the glory of the Father; and also *the riches of his glory*. (Eph. iii 16.) Those that have strong temptations in their course, and over-pressing corruptions in their hearts have need to think of it out of interest, since no thing but this can relieve them. Those that have experimented the working of it in their new creation are obliged to think of it out of gratitude. It was this mighty power over himself that gave rise to all that pardoning grace already conferred, or hereafter expected; without it our souls had been consumed the world overturned; we could not have expected happy heaven, but must have lain in the torments of an eternal hell; had not the power of his mercy exceeded that of his justice, and his infinite power executed what his infinite wisdom had contrived for our redemption.

TRUST IN THE POWER OF GOD.

Well then in all duties where faith is particularly to be acted, forget not this as the main support of it. Do you pray for a flourishing and triumphing grace? Consider him *as able to make all grace abound in you.* (2 Cor. ix. 8.) Do you want comfort and reviving under your contritions, and godly sorrow? Consider him as he declares himself, *the high and lofty one.* (Isaiah lvii. 15.) Are you under pressing distresses; take the advice of Eliphaz to Job, when he tells him what he himself would do if he were in his case: *I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause.* (Job v. 8.) But observe under what considerations, as to one that *doth great things and unsearchable: marvellous things without number.* (verse 9.) When you beg of him the melting your rocky hearts, the subjugation of your strong corruptions, the drawing his beautiful image in your soul, the quickening your dead hearts, and reviving your drooping spirits, and supplying your spiritual wants, consider him as one *able to do abundantly*, not only *above what you can ask*, but *above what you can think.* (Eph. iii. 20.) Faith will be spiritless and prayer will be lifeless, if the power of God be not eyed by us in those things which cannot be done without an arm of omnipotence.

VIII.—THE HOLINESS OF GOD.

ESSENTIAL TO HIS NATURE.

HOLINESS is a glorious perfection belonging to *the nature of God*. Hence he is in scripture styled often the *Holy One*, the *Holy One of Jacob*, the *Holy One of Israel*; and oftener entitled Holy, than Almighty, and set forth by this part of his dignity more than by any other. This is more affixed as an epithet to his name; than any other: you never find it expressed His mighty name, or His wise name; but his Great name, and most of all, his *Holy name*. This is his greatest title of honour, in this does the majesty and venerableness of his name appear.

Though the power of God be the first rational conclusion, drawn from the sight of his works; wisdom the next, from the order and connection of his works; purity must result from the beauty of his works; that God cannot be deformed by evil, who hath made every thing so beautiful in its time. The notion of a God cannot be entertained without separating from him whatsoever is impure and defiling both in his essence and actions.

As it seems to challenge an excellency above all his other perfections, so it is *the glory of all the rest*. As it is the glory of the godhead, so it is the glory of every perfection in the godhead. As his power is the strength of them, so his holiness is the beauty of them. As all would be weak without omni-

potence to back them, so all would be uncomely without holiness to adorn them. Should this be sullied, all the rest would lose their honour and their comfortable efficacy. As at the same instant that the sun should lose its light, it would lose its heat, its strength, its generative and quickening virtue; as sincerity is the lustre of every grace in a Christian, so is purity the splendour of every attribute in the godhead.

SIN A VIOLENCE TO THIS PERFECTION.

There is not an iniquity in the world, but directs its venomous sting against the divine purity; some sins are directed against his omniscience, as secret wickedness; some against his providence, as distrust; some against his mercy, as unbelief; some against his wisdom, as neglecting the means instituted by him, censuring his ways and actings; some against his power, as trusting in means more than in God, and the immoderate fear of men more than of God; some against his truth, as distrusting his promise, or not fearing his threatening; but all agree together in their enmity against this, which is the peculiar glory of the deity, every one of them is a receding from the divine image; and the blackness of every one is the deeper, by how much the distance of it from the holiness of God is the greater. This contrariety to the holiness of God is the cause of all the absolute atheism, if there be any such, in the world; what was the reason the *fool hath said in his heart there is no God?* but because the fool is *corrupt, and hath done abominable works.* (Psalm xiv. 1.) If they believe the being of a God, their own reason will force them to imagine him holy; therefore rather than fancy a holy God, they would fain fancy none at all.

SCOFFING AT HOLINESS IN MAN.

The purity of God is contemned, in hating and *scoffing at the holiness* which is in a creature. Whoever looks upon the holiness of a creature as an unlovely thing, can have no good opinion of the amiableness of divine purity. Whosoever hates those qualities and graces that resemble God in any person, must needs condemn the original pattern, which is more eminent in God. If there be no comeliness in a creature's holiness, to render it grateful to us, we should say of God himself, were he visible among us, with those in the prophet, *There is no beauty in him that we should desire him.* (Isaiah liii. 2.) Holiness is beautiful in itself. If God be the most lovely being, that which is a likeness to him, so far as it resembles him, must needs be amiable, because it partakes of God ; and therefore those that see no beauty in an inferior holiness, but condemn it because it is a purity above them, condemn God much more : he that hates that which is imperfect merely for that excellency which is in it, doth much more hate that which is perfect, without any mixture or stain.

CONSOLATIONS DERIVED FROM GOD'S HOLINESS.

This attribute frowns upon lapsed nature, but smiles in the restorations made by the gospel. God's holiness in conjunction with his justice, is terrible to a guilty sinner ; but now, in conjunction with his mercy, by the satisfaction of Christ, it is sweet to a believing penitent. In the first covenant, the purity of his nature was joined with the rigours of his justice : in the second covenant, the purity of his

nature is joined with the sweetness and tenderness of his mercy. In the one, justice flames against the sinner in the right of injured holiness; in the other, mercy yearns towards a believer, with the consent of the righted holiness. To rejoice in the holiness of God, is the true and genuine spirit of a renewed man: *My heart rejoiceth in the Lord*, and what follows? *There is none holy as the Lord.* (1 Sam. ii. 1, 2.) Some perfections of the divine nature are astonishing, some terrifying, but this may fill us both with astonishment and joy.

By covenant we have an interest in this attribute, as well as any other. In that clause of God's being our God, entire God with all his glory, all his perfections are passed over as a portion, and a gracious soul is brought into union with God, as his God: not with a part of God, but with God in the simplicity, extent, integrity of his nature; and therefore in this attribute. And upon some account it may seem more in this attribute, than in any other; for if he be our God, he is our God in his life and glory, and therefore in his purity especially, without which he could not live, he could not be happy and blessed.

As the honesty of a man gives a reputation to his word; so does the holiness of God give credit to his promise. It is by this he would have us stifle our fears, and fortify our trust; *Fear not thou worm; Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.* (Isaiah xli. 14.) He will be in his actions, what he is in his nature. Nothing shall make him defile his own excellency: unrighteousness is the ground of mutability; but the promise of God never fails, because the rectitude of his nature never languishes. Were his attributes without the conduct of this, they would be altogether formidable. As this is the glory of all his other perfections; so this only renders him comfortable to a believing soul. Might we not

fear his power to crush us, his mercy to overlook us, his wisdom to design against us, if this did not influence them? What an oppression is power without righteousness in the hand of a creature; it is destructive instead of protecting. The devil is a mighty spirit, but not fit to be trusted, because he is an impure spirit. When God would give us the highest security of the sincerity of his intentions, he *swears* by this attribute. (Psalm viii. 35.) His holiness, as well as his truth, is laid down as a pledge for the security of his promise. As we make God the judge between us and others, when we swear by him; so he makes his holiness the judge between himself and his people, when he swears by it.

This attribute renders him fit to be confided in for *the answer of our prayers*. This is the ground of his readiness to give. *If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts; how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him!* (Matt. vii. 11.) Though the holiness of God be not mentioned, yet it is to be understood; the emphasis lies in these words, if you *being evil*: God is then considered in a disposition contrary to this, which can be nothing but his righteousness. ‘If you that are unholy, and have so much corruption in you, to render you cruel, can bestow upon your children the good things they want, how much more shall God, who is holy, and hath nothing in him to check his mercifulness to his creatures, grant the petitions of his suppliants?’

The holiness of God renders him fit to be confided in, for the comfort of our souls in *every afflicted condition*. The reviving the hearts of the spiritually afflicted, is a part of the holiness of his nature. *Thus saith the high and lofty one, that inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble.* (Isaiah lvii. 15.) He ac-

knowledges himself the *lofty one*, they might therefore fear he would not revive them; but he is also the *holy one*, and therefore he will refresh them; he is not more lofty than he is holy; besides the argument of the immutability of his promise, and the might of his power, here is the holiness of his nature moving him to pity his drooping creature. His promise is ushered in with the name of power, *high and lofty One*, to bar their distrust of his strength; and with a declaration of his *holiness*, to check any despair of his will. There is no ground to think I should be false to my word, or misemploy my power, since that cannot be, because of the holiness of my name and nature.

This attribute also renders him fit to be confided in for the *maintenance of grace*, and *protection of us against our spiritual enemies*. What our Saviour thought an argument in prayer, we may well take as a ground of confidence. In the strength of this he puts up his suit, when in his mediatory capacity he intercedes for the preservation of his people, *Holy Father, keep through thy own name those that thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are*. (John xvii. 11.) *Holy Father*, not merciful Father, or powerful or wise Father, but *holy and righteous Father*. (verse 25.) Grace is an image of God's holiness, and therefore the holiness of God is most proper to be used as an argument to interest and engage him in the preservation of it.

Since holiness is a glorious perfection of the nature of God, he will certainly set a *high value upon every holy soul*. When he overlooks strength, parts, knowledge, he cannot overlook this; he *sets apart him that is godly for himself*, (Psalm iv. 3,) as a peculiar object to take pleasure in; he reserves such for his own complacency, when he leaves the rest of the world to the devil's power; he is choice of them above all his other works, and will not let any

have so great a propriety in them as himself. If it be so dear to him here in its imperfect and mixed condition, that he appropriates it as a peculiar object for his own delight; how much more will the unspotted purity of glorified saints be infinitely pleasing to him? So that he will take less pleasure in the material heavens, than in such a soul. Sin only is detestable to God, and when this is done away, the soul becomes as lovely in his account, as before it was loathsome.

It is comfort, upon this account, that God will *perfect holiness* in every upright soul. We many times distrust God, and despond in ourselves, because of the infinite holiness of the divine nature, and the corruptions in our own; but the holiness of God engages him to the preservation of it, and consequently to the perfection of it. The finishing *the good work he hath begun*, hath a relation to the glory of Christ; and his own glory in Christ to be manifested in the day of his appearing, wherein the glory both of his own holiness, and the holiness of the Mediator, are to receive their full manifestation. (Phil. i. 6.) As it is a part of the holiness of Christ to *sanctify his church*, till not a wrinkle or spot be left; so it is the part of God not to leave that work imperfect, which his holiness hath attempted a second time to beautify his creature with. (Eph. v. 26.) He will not cease to exalt this attribute, which is the believer's by the new covenant, till he utters that applauding speech of his own work, *Thou art all fair, my love, there is no spot in thee*.

RIGHT APPREHENSIONS OF THE DIVINE HOLINESS.

A sense of the holiness of God will be of use to us in promoting genuine *convictions*. A deep consideration of the holiness of God cannot but be

followed with a deep consideration of our impure and miserable condition by reason of sin. The sense of guilt is the first natural result upon a sense of this excellent perfection; and the sense of the imperfection of our own righteousness is the next. Who can think of it, and reflect upon himself as an object fit for divine love? Who can have a due thought of it without regarding himself as stubble before a consuming fire? Who can, without a confusion of heart and face, glance upon that pure eye which beholds with detestation the foul motes as well as the more impure spots?

When Isaiah saw his glory, and heard how highly the angels exalted God for this perfection, he was ready to swoon, till a seraphim with a *coal from the altar* both purified and revived him. (Isaiah vi. 5—7.) They are sound and genuine convictions, which have the prospect of divine purity for their immediate spring, and not a foresight of our own misery; when it is not the punishment we have deserved, but the holiness we have offended most grates our hearts. Such convictions are the first rude draughts of the divine image in our spirits; and grateful to God, because they are an acknowledgment of the glory of his attribute, and the first mark of honour given to it by the creature: those that never had a sense of their own vileness, were always destitute of a sense of God's holiness. And by the way we may observe, that those who scoff at any for hanging down the head under the consideration and conviction of sin, as is too usual with the world, scoff at them for having deeper apprehensions of the purity of God than themselves, and consequently make a mock of the holiness of God, which is the ground of those convictions; a sense of this would prevent such wicked reproaching.

A due sense of this perfection, would inflame us with a vehement *desire to be conformed to him*. All

our desires would be ardent to regulate ourselves according to this pattern of holiness and goodness, which is not to be equalled; the contemplating it as it shines forth in the face of God, will *transform us into the same image*. (2 Cor. iii. 19.) How often hath the meditation of the courage of a valiant man, or acuteness and industry of a learned person, spurred on some men to an imitation of them, and transformed them into the same nature? As the looking upon the sun imprints an image of the sun upon our eye, that we seem to behold nothing but the sun a while after. The view of the divine purity would fill us with a holy generosity to imitate him, more than the examples of the best men upon earth. It was a saying of a heathen, that, 'if virtue were visible, it would kindle a noble flame of love to it in the heart, by its ravishing beauty.' Shall the infinite purity of the author of all virtue come short of the strength of a creature? Can we not render that visible to us by frequent meditation, which though it be invisible in his nature, is made visible in his law, in his ways, in his Son? It would make us ready to obey him, since we know he cannot command anything that is sinful, but what is holy, just, and good: it would put all our affections in their due place, elevate them above the creature, and subject them to the Creator.

IX.—THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

THE DIVINE PREROGATIVE.

PURE and perfect goodness is *only the royal prerogative of God*: goodness is a choice perfection of the divine nature. This is the true and genuine character of God; he is good, he is goodness, good in himself, good in his essence, good in the highest degree, possessing whatsoever is comely, excellent, desirable; the highest good, because the first good; whatsoever is perfect goodness, is GOD; whatsoever is truly goodness in any creature, is a resemblance of God. All the names of God are comprehended in this one of good. All gifts, all variety of goodness, are contained in him as one common good. He is the efficient cause of all good, by an overflowing goodness of his nature; he refers all things to himself as the end, for the representation of his own goodness; *truly God is good*. (Psalm lxxiii. 1.) Certainly it is an undoubted truth, it is written in his works of nature; and his acts of grace, *he is abundant in goodness*. (Exod. xxxiv. 6.) And every thing is a memorial, not of some few sparks, but of his greater goodness. (Psalm cxlv. 7.)

No perfection of the divine nature is more eminently, nor more speedily visible in the whole book of the creation than this. His greatness shines not in any part of it, where his goodness does not shine

as gloriously. Whatsoever is the instrument of his work, as his power; whatsoever is the orderer of his work, as his wisdom; yet nothing can be adored as the motive of his work, but the goodness of his nature. This only could induce him to resolve to create; his wisdom then steps in to dispose the methods of what he resolved; and his power follows to execute what his wisdom has disposed, and his goodness designed. His power in making, and his wisdom in ordering, are subservient to his goodness; and this goodness which is the end of the creation, is as visible to the eyes of men, and as legible to the understanding, as his power in forming them, and his wisdom in tuning them.

This is the most pleasant perfection of the divine nature; his creating power amazes us, his conducting wisdom astonisheth us, his goodness, as furnishing us with all conveniences, delights us, and renders both his amazing power, and astonishing wisdom delightful to us. As the sun by effecting things, is an emblem of God's power, by discovering things to us, is an emblem of his wisdom, but by refreshing and comforting us, is an emblem of his goodness; and without this refreshing virtue it communicates to us, we should take no pleasure in the creatures it produces, nor in the beauties it discovers. As God is great and powerful, he is the object of our understanding; but as good and bountiful, he is the object of our love and desire.

WHAT HIS GOODNESS IS.

The goodness of God comprehends *all his attributes*. The whole catalogue of *mercy, grace, long-suffering, abundance of truth*, summed up in this one word. All are streams from this fountain; he could be none of this, were he not first good. When it

confers happiness without merit, it is grace ; when it bestows happiness against merit, it is mercy ; when he bears with provoking rebels, it is long-suffering ; when he performs his promise, it is truth ; when it meets with a person, to whom it is not obliged, it is grace ; when he meets with a person, to which he hath obliged himself by promise, it is truth ; when it commiserates a distressed person, it is pity ; when it supplies an indigent person, it is bounty ; when it succours an innocent person, it is righteousness ; and when it pardons a penitent, it is mercy ; all summed up in this one name of goodness ; and the Psalmist expresseth the same sentiment in the same words : *They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness. The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy ; the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.* (Psalm cxlv. 7, 8.)

This attribute is so full of God, that it deifies all the rest, and verifies the adorableness of him. His wisdom might contrive against us, his power bear too hard upon us ; one might be too hard for an ignorant, and the other too mighty for an impotent creature ; his holiness would scare an impure and guilty creature, but his goodness conducts them all for us, and makes them all amiable to us ; whatever comeliness they have in the eye of a creature, whatever comfort they afford to the heart of a creature, we are obliged for all to his goodness. This puts all the rest upon a delightful exercise, this makes his wisdom design for us, and his power to act for us ; this veils his holiness from affrighting us, and spirits his mercy to relieve us.

THE NATURE OF HIS GOODNESS.

This goodness is *communicative*. None so communicatively good as God.

Indeed the more excellent any thing is, the more nobly it acts. How remotely does light, that excellent brightness of the creation, disperse itself? How does that glorious creature, which God hath set in the heavens, spread its wings over heaven and earth, cast its beams upward and downward, insinuate into all corners, pierce the depths, and shoot up its rays into the heights, encircle the higher and lower creatures, reach out its communications to influence every thing under the earth ; as well as dart its beams of light and heat on things above, or upon the earth? *Nothing is hid from it* ; not from its power, nor from its sweetness. How communicative also is water? How active is it in a river, to nourish the living creatures it engenders? Refreshes every shore it runs by, promotes the propagation of fruits for the nourishment, and bestows a verdure upon the ground for the delight of man : and where it cannot reach the higher ground in its substance, it doth by its vapours mounted up and concocted by the sun, and gently distilled upon the earth, for the production of its fruits. God is more prone to communicate himself, than the sun to spread its wings, or the earth to mount up its fruits, or the water to multiply living creatures. Goodness is his nature. Hence were there internal communications of himself from eternity ; diffusions of himself without himself in time, in the creation of the world, like a full vessel running over. He created the world that he might impart his goodness to something without him, and diffuse larger measures of his goodness, after he had laid the first foundation of it in its being ; and

therefore he created several sorts of creatures, that they might be capable of various and distinct measures of his liberality, according to the distinct capacities of their nature; but imparted most to the rational creature, because that is only capable of an understanding to know him, and will to embrace him. He is the highest goodness, and therefore a communicative goodness, and acts excellently according to his nature.

What God gives out of goodness, he gives with joy and gladness. He did not only will that we should be, but rejoice that he had brought us into being. He *rejoiced* in his *works*. And his wisdom stood by him, *delighting in the habitable parts of the earth*. (Prov. viii. 31.) He beheld the world after its creation with a complacency, and still governs it with the same pleasure wherewith he reviewed it. Infinite cheerfulness attends infinite goodness. He would not give, if he had not a pleasure that others should enjoy his goodness; since he is better than any thing, and more communicative than any thing; he is more joyful in giving out, than the sun can be to run its race in pouring forth light.

APPEARS IN REDEMPTION.

The first resolution to redeem, and the means appointed for redemption, could have *no other inducement* but divine goodness. We cannot too highly value the merit of Christ; but we must not so much extend the merit of Christ, as to draw a value to eclipse the goodness of God; though we owe our redemption, and the fruits of it, to the death of Christ, yet we owe not the first resolutions of redemption, and assumption of our nature, the means of redemption, to the merit of Christ. Divine goodness only, without the association of any merit, not

only of man, but of the Redeemer himself, begat the first purpose of our recovery; he was singled out, and predestinated to be our Redeemer, before he took our nature to merit our redemption. *God sent his Son*, is a frequent expression in the gospel of St. John. To what end did God send Christ, but to redeem? The purpose of redemption therefore preceded the pitching upon Christ as the means and procuring cause of our actual redemption, but not of the redeeming purpose; the end is always in intention before the means. *God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son*; the love of God to the world was first in intention and the order of nature, before the will of giving his Son to the world.

When God intended in redemption the manifestation of his highest goodness, it could not be without the donation of the choicest gift; as when he would ensure our comfort, he swears *by himself*, because he cannot swear *by a greater*. (Heb. vi. 15.) So when he would ensure our happiness, he gives up his Son, because he cannot give a greater, being equal with himself.

The wounds of an Almighty God for us are a greater testimony of goodness, than if we had all the other riches of heaven and earth. This perfection had not appeared in such an astonishing grandeur, had it pardoned us without so rich a satisfaction; that had been pardon to our sin, not a God of our nature. *God so loved the world* that he pardoned it, had not sounded so great and so good, as *God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son*. There is something in Christ more excellent and comely than the office of a Saviour; the greatness of his person is more excellent than the salvation procured by his death. It was a greater gift than was bestowed upon innocent Adam, or the holy angels. In the creation, his goodness gave us crea-

tures for our use. In our redemption, his goodness gives us what was dearest to him for our service; our sovereign in office to benefit us, as well as in a royalty to govern us.

He gave him to us, to suffer for us as a man, and redeem us as a God; to be a sacrifice to expiate our sin by translating the punishment upon himself, which was merited by us. Thus was he made low to exalt us, and debased to advance us, *made poor to enrich us*, (2 Cor. viii. 9); and eclipsed to brighten our sullied natures, and wounded that he might be a *physician* for our diseases. He was ordered to taste the bitter cup of death, that we might drink of the rivers of immortal life and pleasures; to submit to the frailties of the human nature, that we might possess the glories of the divine; he was ordered to be a sufferer, that we might be no longer captives; and to pass through the fire of divine wrath, that he might purge our nature from the dross it had contracted. Thus was the Righteous given for sin, the Innocent for criminals, the Glory of heaven for the dregs of earth, and the immense riches of a Deity expended to restore man.

Divine goodness did not only give him to us, but gave him power, riches, strength, and honour, for manifesting this goodness to us, and opening the passages for its fuller conveyances to the sons of men. Had not God had thoughts of a perpetual goodness, he would not have settled him so near him, to manage our cause, and testified so much affection to him on our behalf. This goodness gave him to be debased for us, and ordered him to be enthroned for us. As it gave him to us bleeding, so it would give him to us triumphing; that as we have a share by grace in the merits of his humiliation, we might partake also of the glories of his coronation; that from first to last we may behold nothing but the triumphs of divine goodness to fallen man.

Whatsoever is great and excellent in the godhead, the Father gives us, by giving us his Son: the Creator gives himself to us in his Son Christ. In giving creatures to us, he gives the riches of earth; in giving himself to us, he gives the riches of heaven, which surmount all understanding: it is in this gift he becomes our God, and passeth over the title of all that he is, for our use and benefit, that every attribute in the divine nature may be claimed by us; not to be imparted to us, whereby we may be deified; but employed for our welfare, whereby we may be blessed. He gave himself in creation to us, in the image of his holiness; but in redemption, he gave himself in the image of his person; he would not only communicate the goodness without him, but bestow upon us the infinite goodness of his own nature, that that which was his own end and happiness, might be our end and happiness, viz. himself.

By creation, we had an affinity with animals in our bodies, with angels in our spirits, with God in his image; but not with God in our nature, till the incarnation of the Redeemer. *Adam* by creation was the Son of God, but his nature was not one with the person of God; he was his Son as created by him, but had no affinity to him by virtue of union with him; but now man doth not only see his nature in multitudes of men on earth, but by an astonishing goodness, beholds his nature united to the Deity in heaven: that as he was the Son of God by creation, he is now the brother of God by redemption; for with such a title doth that person, who was the *Son* of God as well as the *Son* of man, honour his disciples, (John xx. 17); and because he is of the same nature with them, *he is not ashamed to call them brethren.* (Heb. ii. 11.)

Our nature, which was infinitely distant from, and below the Deity, now makes one person with the Son

of God. What man sinfully aspired to, God has graciously granted, and more: man aspired to a likeness in knowledge, and God hath granted him an affinity in union. It had been astonishing goodness to angelize our nature; but in redemption, divine goodness hath acted higher, in a sort to deify our natures. In creation, our nature was exalted above other creatures on earth; in our redemption, our nature is exalted above all the host of heaven; we were higher than the beasts, as creatures, but *lower than the angels*, (Psalm viii. 5); but by the incarnation of the Son of God, our nature is elevated many steps above them. After it had sunk itself by corruption below the bestial nature, and as low as the diabolical, the *fulness of the Godhead dwells in our nature bodily*, but never in the angels angelically. The Son of God descended to dignify our nature, by assuming it, and ascended with our nature to have it crowned above those standing monuments of divine power and goodness. That person that descended in our nature into the grave, and in the same nature was raised up again, is in that same nature set at the right-hand of God in heaven, *far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named*.

Our refined clay by an indissoluble union with this divine person, is honoured to sit for ever upon a throne above all the tribes of seraphim and cherubim; and the person that wears it, is the head of the good angels, and the conqueror of the bad; the one are put under his feet, and the other commanded to adore him, *that purged our sins in our nature*, (Heb. i. 3, 6); that divine person in our nature receives adoration from the angels; but the nature of man is not ordered to pay any homage and adorations to the angels. How could divine goodness to man more magnify itself? As we could not have a lower descent than we had by sin, how could we have a

higher ascent, than by a substantial participation of a divine life in our nature in the unity of a divine person? Our earthly nature is joined to a heavenly person; our undone nature united to *one equal with God*. (Phil. ii. 6.) It may truly be said, that man is God, which is infinitely more glorious for us, than if it could be said, man is an angel. If it were goodness to advance our innocent nature above other creatures, the advancement of our degenerate nature above angels, deserves a higher title than mere goodness. It is a more gracious act, than if all men had been transformed into the pure spiritual nature of the loftiest cherubim.

MANIFESTED IN THE COVENANT OF GRACE.

His goodness is seen in the *nature and tenor* of the new covenant. There are in this richer streams of love and pity. The language of one was, *die* if thou sin; that of the other, *live* if thou believest. The old covenant was founded upon the obedience of man; the new is not founded upon the inconstancy of man's will, but the firmness of divine love, and the valuable merit of Christ.

As he gave the blood of his Son to seal the covenant, so he gave himself as the blessing of the covenant: *He is not ashamed to be called their God*. (Jer. xxxii. 38.) Though he be environed with millions of angels, and presides over them in an inexpressible glory, he is not ashamed of his condescensions to man, and to pass over himself as the proprietor of his people, as well as to take them to be his.

This of God's being our God, is the quintessence of the covenant, the soul of all the promises: in this he has promised whatsoever is infinite in him, whatsoever is the glory and ornament of his nature for

our use: not a part of him, or one single perfection, but the whole vigour and strength of all. As he is not a God without infinite wisdom, and infinite power, and infinite goodness, and infinite blessedness, &c. so he passes over in this covenant all that which presents him as the most adorable being to his creatures; he will be to them as great, as wise, as powerful, as good as he is in himself. And the assuring us in this covenant to be our God, imports also that he will do as much for us, as we would do for ourselves, were we furnished with the same goodness, power, and wisdom: in being our God, he testifies it is all one, as if we had the same perfections in our own power to employ for our use. What a rich goodness, and a fulness of bounty, is there in this short expression, as full as the expression of a God can make it to be intelligible, to such creatures as we are?

SIGNIFIED IN THE SACRAMENTS.

Divine goodness is eminent in the *sacraments* he hath affixed to this covenant, especially in the Lord's Supper. Under those signs that body is presented; that which was conceived by the Spirit, inhabited by the godhead, bruised by the Father to be our food, as well as our propitiation, is presented to us on the table; that blood which satisfied justice, washed away our guilt on the cross, and pleads for our persons at the throne of grace; that blood which silenced the curse, pacified heaven, and purged earth, is given to us for our refreshment. This is the *bread sent from heaven*, the true *manna*; the cup is the *cup of blessing*, and therefore a cup of goodness. (1 Cor. x. 15.) It is true, the bread does not cease to be bread, nor the wine cease to be wine; neither of them lose their substance, but both acquire a

sanctification, by the relation they have to that which they represent, and give a nourishment to that faith that receives them.

In those God offers us a remedy for the sting of sin, and troubles of conscience; he gives us not the blood of a mere man, or the blood of an incarnate angel, but of God blessed for ever; a blood that can secure us against the wrath of heaven, and the tumults of our consciences; a blood that can wash away our sins, and beautify our souls: a blood that has more strength than our guilt, and more prevalence than our accuser: a blood that secures us against the terrors of death, and purifies us for the blessedness of heaven. The goodness of God complies with our senses, and condescends to our weakness; he instructs us by the eye, as well as by the ear: he lets us see, and taste, and feel him, as well as hear him; he veils his glory under earthly elements, and informs our understanding in the mysteries of salvation by signs familiar to our senses; and because we cannot with our bodily eyes behold him in his glory, he presents him to the eyes of our minds in elements, to affect our understandings in the representations of his death. The body of Christ crucified is more visible to our spiritual sense, than the invisible Deity could be visible in his flesh upon earth; and the power of his body and blood is as well experienced in our souls, as the power of his divinity was seen by the Jews in his miraculous actions in his body in the world. It is the goodness of God, to mind us frequently of the great things Christ hath purchased; that as himself would not let them be out of his mind, to communicate them to us, so he would give us means to preserve them in our minds, to adore him for them, and request them of him; whereby he doth evidence his own solicitousness, that we should not be deprived by our own forgetfulness of that grace, Christ hath

hased for us: it was to remember the Redeemer, *shew his death till he came.* (1 Cor. xi. 25, 26.)

vine goodness evidences itself, not only in ing a gracious covenant with us, but fixing seals; not to strengthen his own obligation, which stronger than the foundations of heaven and earth, upon the credit of his word, but to strengthen our weakness, and support our security, by some-thing which might appear more formal and solemn than a bare word. By this, the divine goodness declares against our spiritual faintings, and shews real signs as well as verbal declarations, that the covenant sealed by the blood of Christ is unchangeable; and thereby would fortify and mount our souls to degrees in some measure suitable to the greatness of the covenant, and the dignity of the Redeemer's blood. And it is yet a further degree of his goodness, that he hath appointed us so often to celebrate it, whereby he shews how careful he is to keep up our tottering faith, and preserve us constant in our obedience; obliging himself to the remembrance of his promise, and obliging us to the performance of our duty.

His goodness is seen in the sacrament in giving us an *union and communion with Christ*. There is not only a *commemoration* of Christ dying, but a *communication* of Christ living. The apostle strongly tests it by way of interrogation; *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?* (1 Cor. x. 16.) In this cup there is a communication of the blood of Christ, a conveyance of a right to the merits of his life, and the blessedness of his life; we are not by this made one body with Christ, than we are by *communion*, (1 Cor. xii. 13); and put on Christ living by *communion*, as well as in baptism, (Gal. iii. 27); that as *our* infirm flesh, was a real incarnation,

so the giving us his flesh to eat, is his mystical incarnation in believers, whereby they become one body with him as crucified, and one body with him as risen; for if Christ himself be received by faith in the word, (Colos. ii. 6,) he is no less received by faith in the sacrament.

EXTENDED TO THE LOWER CREATION.

This goodness in redemption extends itself to the *lower creation*. It takes in not only man, but the whole creation, except the fallen angels, and gives a participation of it to insensible creatures; upon the account of this redemption the sun and all kind of creatures were preserved, which otherwise had sunk into destruction upon the sin of man, and ceased from their being, as man had utterly ceased from his happiness. *By him all things consist.* (Colos. i. 17.) The fall of man brought not only a misery upon himself, but a vanity upon the creature; the earth groaned under a curse for his sake. They were all created for the glory of God, and the support of man in the performance of his duty, who was obliged to use them for the honour of him that created them both. Had man been true to his obligations, and used the creatures for that end, to which they were dedicated by the Creator; as God would have then rejoiced in his works, so his works would have rejoiced in the honour of answering so excellent an end.

It is the pang of universal nature, the agony of the whole creation, to be alienated from the original use for which they were intended, and to be disjoined from their end, to serve the disloyalty of a rebel. The drunkard's cup, and the glutton's table, the adulterer's bed, and the proud man's purple, would groan against the abuser of them. But when

all the fruits of redemption shall be completed, the goodness of God shall pour itself upon the creatures, deliver them from the *bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God*, (Rom. viii. 21); they shall be reduced to their true end, and returned in their original harmony.

As redemption restores man to his true end, so it restores the creatures to their true use. The restoration of the world to its beauty and order was the design of the divine goodness in the coming of Christ, as it is intimated in Isaiah xi. 6—9, As he *came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it*, so he came not to destroy the creatures, but to repair them; to restore to God the honour and pleasure of the creation, and restore to the creatures their felicity in restoring their order. The Fall corrupted it, and the full redemption of men restores it. The last time is called not a time of destruction, but a *time of restitution*, and that *of all things* of universal nature, the main part of the creation at least. (Acts iii. 21.)

Hence all creatures are called upon to *rejoice* upon the perfection of salvation, and the appearance of Christ's royal authority in the world. (Psalm xcvi. 11, 12; xcvi. 7, 8.) If they were to be destroyed, there would be no ground to invite them to triumph. Thus doth divine goodness spread its kind arms over the whole creation.

IN ANSWERING PRAYER.

Divine goodness appears in *answering prayer*. He delights to be familiarly acquainted with his people, and to hear them call upon him. He indulges them a free access to him, and *delights* in every address of an *upright man*. (Prov. xv. 8.) The wonderful efficacy of prayer depends not upon the nature of our petitions, or the temper of our soul, but the goodness

of God whom we address. Christ establisheth it upon this bottom ; when he exhorts to ask in his name, he tells them the spring of all their grants, is the Father's love. *I say not, I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loveth you.* (John xvi. 26, 27.)

Of all the good and rich things divine goodness has in its treasury, he delights to give the best upon asking, because God acts so, as to manifest the greatness of his bounty and magnificence to men ; and therefore is delighted when men, by their petitioning him, own such a liberal disposition in him, and put him upon the manifesting it. He would rather you should ask the greatest things heaven can afford, than the trifles of this world ; because his bounty is not discovered in meaner gifts, he loves to have an opportunity to manifest his affection, above the liberality and tenderness of worldly fathers. He does more wait to give in a way of grace, than we to beg. And therefore *will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you.* (Isaiah xxx. 18.) He stands expecting your suits, and employs his wisdom in pitching upon the fittest seasons, when the manifestation of his goodness may be most gracious in itself, and the mercy you want most welcome to you ; as it follows, for *the Lord is a God of judgment.*

RENDERS HIM INFINITELY AMIABLE.

This attribute of goodness renders him *more lovely* than any other attribute. He never requires our adoration of him so much, as the strongest or wisest, but as the best of beings : he uses this chiefly, to constrain and allure us. Why would he be feared or worshipped, but because *there is forgiveness with him ?* (Psalm cxxx. 4.) It is for his goodness' sake, that he is sued to by his people in distress, *For thy goodness'*

sake, *O Lord*. (Psalm xxv. 7.) Men may be admired because of their knowledge, but they are objects of affection because of their goodness: the will in all the variety of objects it pursues, centres in this one thing of good as the term of its appetite. All things are beloved by men, because they have been bettered by them, or because they expect to be the better for them. Severity can never conquer enmity, and kindle love: were there nothing but wrath in the Deity, it would make him be feared, and render him odious, and that to an innocent nature. As the *spouse* speaks of Christ, so we may of God, (Cant. v. 10, 11); though she commends him for his *head*, the excellency of his wisdom, his *eyes*, the extent of his omniscience, his *hands*, the greatness of his power, and his *legs*, the swiftness of his motions, and ways to and for his people; yet the *sweetness of his mouth*, in his gracious words and promises closes all, and is followed with nothing but an exclamation, that *he is altogether lovely*. (verse 16.) His mouth in pronouncing pardon of sin, and justification of the person, presents him most lovely.

A MOTIVE TO TRUST IN HIM.

Goodness is the *first motive* of trust. The principal foundation of *faith* is not the word of God, but God himself, and God is considered in this perfection. As the goodness of God in his invitations, and providential blessings, *leads us to repentance*, (Rom. ii. 4); so by the same reason, the goodness of God by his promises, leads us to reliance. The *truth* of the promiser makes the promise credible, but the goodness of the promiser makes it cheerfully relied on. In Psalm lxxiii. Asaph's penitential psalm for his distrust of God, he begins the first

verse with an assertion of this attribute. *Truly God is good to Israel*, (verse 1,) and ends with this fruit of it, *I will put my trust in the Lord God*. (verse 28.)

We never please him more than when we trust in him: *The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him, in them that hope in his mercy*. (Psalm cxlvii. 11.) He takes it for an honour, to have this attribute exalted by such a carriage of his creature. He is no less offended, when we think his heart straitened, as if he were a parsimonious God, than when we think his arm shortened, as if he were an impotent and feeble God.

Let us therefore make this *use of his goodness*, to hearten our *faith*. When we are scared by the terrors of his justice, when we are dazzled by the arts of his wisdom, and confounded by the splendour of his majesty, we may take refuge in the sanctuary of his goodness; this will encourage us, as well as astonish us, whereas the consideration of his other attributes would only amaze us, but can never refresh us, but when they are considered marching under the conduct and banners of this.

HOW A SENSE OF IT WILL INFLUENCE.

The consideration of his goodness would dispose us to a composed frame of spirit. If we are sick, it is goodness, it is a disease, and not a hell; it is goodness that it is a cloud, and not a total darkness. What if he transfers from us what we have? He takes no more than what his goodness first imparted to us; and never takes so much from his people as his goodness leaves them. If he strips them of their lives, he leaves them their souls, with those faculties he furnished them with at first, and removes them from those houses of clay to a richer mansion. The

time of our sufferings here, were it the whole course of our life, bears not the proportion of a moment to that endless eternity wherein he hath designed to manifest his goodness to us.

It would check any motions of envy. It would make us joy in the prosperity of good men, and hinder us from envying the outward felicity of the wicked. We should not dare with an *evil eye* to censure his good hand. (Matt. xx. 15); but approve of what he thinks fit to do, both in the matter of his liberality, and the subjects he chooseth for it. Though if the disposal were in our hands, we should not imitate him, as not thinking them subjects fit for bounty; yet since it is in his hands, we are to approve of his actions, and not to have an ill-will towards him for his goodness, or towards those he is pleased to make the subjects of it. Since all his blessings are given to invite man to repentance, (Rom. ii. 4); to envy them those goods God hath bestowed upon them, is to envy God the glory of his own goodness, and them the felicity those things might move them to aspire to. It is to wish God more contracted, and thy neighbour more miserable; but a deep sense of his sovereign goodness, would make us rejoice in any marks of it upon others, and move us to bless him instead of censuring him.

HOW TO BE IMITATED.

Imitate this goodness of God. If his goodness hath such an influence upon us as to make us love him, it will also move us with an ardent zeal to imitate him in it. Christ makes this use from the doctrine of divine goodness. *Do good to them that hate you, that you may be the children of your Father*

which is in heaven, for he makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good. (Matt. v. 44, 45.) As holiness is a resemblance of God's purity, so charity is a resemblance of God's goodness: and this our Saviour calls perfection; *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* (verse 48.) As God would not be a perfect God without goodness, so neither can any be a perfect Christian without kindness; charity and love being the splendour and loveliness of all Christian graces, as goodness is the splendour and loveliness of all divine attributes. This, and holiness, are ordered in the scripture to be the grand patterns of our imitation. Imitate the goodness of God in two things:

In relieving and assisting others in distress. Let our heart be as large in the capacity of creatures, as God's is in the capacity of a Creator. A large heart from him to us, and a strait heart from us to others, will not suit: let us not think any so far below us, as to be unworthy of our care, since God thinks none, that are infinitely distant from him, too mean for his. His infinite glory raises him above the creature, but his infinite goodness stoops him to the meanest works of his hands.

Imitate God in his goodness, in a kindness to our *worst enemies*. The best man is more unworthy to receive any thing from God, than the worst can be to receive from us. How kind is God to those that blaspheme him! He gives them the same sun, and the same showers, that he does to the best men in the world! Is it not more our glory to imitate God, in doing *good to those that hate us*, than to imitate the men of the world in requiting evil, by a return of a seven-fold mischief?

It can be no disparagement to any man's dignity to cast his influences on his greatest opposers, since God, who acts for his own glory, thinks not himself disparaged by sending forth the streams of his

bounty on the wickedest persons, who are far meaner to him than those of the same blood can be to us. Who has the worst thoughts of the sun for shining upon the earth, that sends up vapours to cloud it? It can be no disgrace to resemble God; if his hand and heart be open to us, let not ours be shut to any.

X.—THE DOMINION OF GOD.

THERE is a *threefold* dominion of God. 1. *Natural*, which is absolute over all creatures, and is founded in the nature of God as Creator. 2. *Spiritual* or gracious; which is a dominion over his church as redeemed, and founded in the covenant of grace. 3. A *glorious* kingdom at the winding up of all, wherein he shall reign over all, either in the glory of his mercy, as over the glorified saints; or in the glory of his justice, in the condemned devils and men.

ITS WISDOM.

This dominion is managed by the rules of wisdom, righteousness, and goodness. If his throne be in the heavens, it is pure and good; because the heavens are the purest parts of the creation, and influence by their goodness the lower earth. Since he is his own rule, and his nature is infinitely wise, holy, and righteous, he cannot do a thing, but what is unquestionably agreeable with wisdom, justice, and purity. In all the exercises of his sovereign right, he is never unattended with those perfections of his nature. Might not God by his absolute power have pardoned men's guilt, and thrown the invading

sin out of his creatures? But in regard of his truth pledged in his threatening, and in regard of justice, which demanded satisfaction, he would not. Might not God by his absolute sovereignty admit a man into his friendship, without giving him any grace? But in regard of the incongruity of such an act to his wisdom and holiness, he will not. May he not, by his absolute power, refuse to accept a man that desires to please him, and reject a purely innocent creature? But in regard of his goodness and righteousness he will not. Though innocence be amiable in its own nature, yet it is not necessary in regard of God's sovereignty that he should love it; but in regard of his goodness it is necessary, and he will never do otherwise.

What may appear to us to have no other spring than absolute sovereignty, would be found to have a depth of amazing wisdom, and accountable reason, were our short capacities long enough to fathom it. When the apostle had been discoursing of the eternal counsels of God, in seizing upon one man and letting go another, in rejecting the Jews and gathering in the Gentiles, which appear to us to be results only of an absolute dominion, yet he resolves not those amazing acts into that, without taking it for granted, that they were governed by exact wisdom, though beyond his ken to see, and his line to sound. *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God; how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out.* (Rom. xi. 33.) The other attributes of power and goodness are more easily perceptible in the works of God, than his wisdom. The first view of the creation strikes us with this sentiment, that the Author of this great fabric was mighty and beneficial; but his wisdom lies deeper than to be discerned at the first glance without a diligent inquiry, as at the first casting our eyes upon the sea, we behold its motion, colour, and

something of its vastness, but we cannot presently fathom the depth of it, and understand those lower fountains that supply that great ocean of waters. It is part of God's sovereignty, as it is of the wisest princes, that he hath a wisdom beyond the reach of his subjects; it is not for a finite nature to understand an infinite wisdom, nor for a foolish creature that hath lost his understanding by the fall, to judge of the reason of the methods of a wise counsellor.

ITS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

In all his ways he is righteous. (Psalm cxlv. 17.) In his ways of terror, as well as those of sweetness; in those works wherein little else but that of his sovereignty appears to us. It is always linked with his holiness, that he will not do by his absolute right any thing but what is conformable to it; since his dominion is founded upon the excellency of his nature, he will not do anything but what is agreeable to it, and becoming his other perfections.

SHEWN IN TERROR OR COMFORT.

His dominion is seen in regard of *terror* or *comfort*. The heart or conscience is God's special throne on earth, which he hath reserved to himself, and never indulged human authority to sit upon it. He solely orders this in ways of conviction or comfort. He can flash terror into men's spirits in the midst of their earthly jollities, and put death into their consciences when they are boiling up themselves in a high pitch of worldly delights: and can raise men's spirits above the sense of torment under racks and flames. He can draw a hand-writing, not only in the outward chamber but the inward closet, bring

the rack into the inward soul of a man. None can infuse comfort, when he writes bitter things, nor can any fill the heart with gall, when he drops in honey.

IN BESTOWING GRACE.

Why does he not give all his converts an equal measure of his sanctifying grace; some have mites, and some have treasures? Why does he give his grace to some sooner, to some later; some are inspired in their infancy, others not till a full age, and after; some not till they have fallen into some gross sin, as Paul; some betimes, that they may do him service; others later, as the thief upon the cross, and presently snatches them out of the world? Some are weaker, some stronger in nature, some more beautiful and lovely, others more uncomely and sluggish. It is so in supernaturals. What reason is there for this, but his own will? This is instead of all that can be assigned on the part of God. He is the free disposer of his own goods, and, as a father, may give a greater portion to one child than to another.

What reason but the sovereign pleasure of God can be alleged why Christ forbade the apostles, at their first commission, to preach to the Gentiles? (Matt. x. 15); but, at the second and standing commission, orders them to *preach to every creature*. Why did he put a demur to the resolutions of Paul and Timothy, to impart light to Bithynia, or order them to go into Macedonia? Was that country more worthy upon whom lay a great part of the blood of the world shed in Alexander's time? (Acts xvi. 6, 7, 9, 10.) Why should Chorazin and Bethsaida enjoy those means that were not granted to the Tyrians and Sidonians, who might probably have

sooner reached out their arms to welcome it? (Matt. xi. 21.) Why should God send the gospel into our island, and cause it to flourish so long here, and not send it, or continue it, in the furthest eastern parts of the world? Why should the very profession of Christianity possess so small a compass of ground in the world, but five parts in thirty, the Mahometans holding six parts, and the other nineteen overgrown with Paganism, where either the gospel was never planted, or else since rooted up? To whom will you refer this, but to the same cause our Saviour doth the revelation of the gospel to babes, and not to the wise, even to his Father? *For so it seemed good in thy sight*, (Matt. xi. 25, 26); *For so was thy good pleasure before thee*, as in the original.

His sovereignty is manifested in the various influences of the means of grace. He saith to these waters of the sanctuary, as to the floods of the sea, *Hitherto you shall go, and no further*. Sometimes they wash away outward impurities, but not those of the spirit. The gospel spiritualizes some, and only moralizes others; some are by the power of it struck down to conviction, but not raised up to conversion. Some have only the gleams of it in their consciences, and others more powerful flashes; some remain in their thick darkness under the beaming of the gospel every day in their face, and after a long insensibleness are roused by its light and warmth. Sometimes there is such a powerful breath in it, that it levels the haughty imaginations of men, and lays them at its feet, that before strutted against it in the pride of their heart. The foundation of this is not in the gospel itself, which is always the same, nor in the ordinances, which are channels, as sound at one time as at another, but divine sovereignty, that spirits them as he pleaseth, and *blows when and where it lists*. It has sometimes conquered its thousands. (Acts ii. 41.) At another time scarce its tens;

sometimes the harvest hath been great, when the labourers have been but few ; at another time it hath been small, when the labourers have been many. Sometimes whole sheaves, at another time scarce gleanings. The evangelical net hath been sometimes full at a cast, and at every cast ; at another time, many have laboured all night and day too, and caught nothing ; *The Lord added to the church daily.* (Acts ii. 47.) The gospel chariot does not always return with captives chained to the sides of it, but sometimes blurred and reproached, wearing the marks of infernal spite, instead of imprinting the marks of its own beauty. In Corinth it triumphed over many people, (Acts xviii. 10) ; in Athens it is mocked, and gathers but a few clusters. (Acts xvii. 32, 34.)

And do we not sometimes experience that after the most solemn preparations of the heart, we are frustrated of those incomes we expected ; perhaps it was because we thought divine returns were due to our preparations, and God stops up the channel, and we return drier than we came, that God may confute our false opinion, and preserve the honour of his own sovereignty. Sometimes we leap with John Baptist at the first appearance of Christ ; sometimes we lie upon the bed of sloth when he knocks from heaven. Sometimes the fleece is dry and sometimes wet, and God withholds to drop down his dew of the morning upon it. The dews of his word, as well as the droppings of the clouds, belong to his royalty. Light will not shine into the heart, though it shine round about us, without the sovereign order of that God, *who commanded light to shine out of the darkness* of the chaos. (2 Cor. iv. 6.) And is it not seen also in regard of the refreshing influences of the word ? Sometimes the strongest arguments and clearest promises prevail nothing towards the quelling black and despairing imaginations, when afterwards we

have found them frightened away by an unexpected word, that seemed to have less virtue in itself, than any that passed in vain before it. The reasonings of wisdom have dropped down like arrows against a brazen wall, when the speech of a weaker person has found an efficacy. It is God, by his sovereignty, spirits one word and not another. Sometimes a secret word comes in, which was not thought of before, has dropped from heaven, and gives a refreshing, when emptiness was found in all the rest. One word from the lips of a sovereign prince is a greater cordial than all the harangues of subjects without it. What is the reason of this variety, but that God would increase the proofs of his own sovereignty? That as it was a part of his dominion to create the beauty of a world, so it is no less to create the peace as well as the grace of the heart. *I create the fruit of the lips of peace.* (Isaiah lvii. 19.)

IN BESTOWING WEALTH AND HONOUR.

His sovereignty is manifest in the *bestowing much wealth and honour upon some*, and not vouchsafing it to *the more industrious labours of others*. Some are abased, and others are elevated, some are enriched, and others impoverished, some scarce feel any cross, and others scarce feel any comfort in their whole lives. Some sweat and toil, and what they labour for runs out of their reach : others sit still, and what they wish for falls into their lap. One of the same clay hath a diadem to beautify his head, and another wants a covering to protect him from the weather. One hath a stately palace to lodge in, and another is scarce master of a cottage where to lay his head. A sceptre is put into one man's hand, and a spade into another's. A rich purple adorns one man's body, while another wraps himself in rags. The poverty



of some, and the wealth of others, is an effect of the divine sovereignty, whence God is said to be the Maker of the *poor as well as the rich*, (Prov. xxii. 2); not only of their persons but of their conditions.

IN RESTRAINING THE PASSIONS OF MEN.

The stilling the principles of commotions in men, and the noise of the sea, are arguments of the divine dominion, neither the one nor the other is in the power of the most sovereign prince without divine assistance. As no prince can command a calm to a raging sea, so no prince can order stillness to a tumultuous people; they are both put together as equally parts of the divine prerogative. Which *stills the noise of the sea, and tumults of the people*. (Psalm lxxv. 7.) And David owns God's sovereignty more than his own, *in subduing the people under him*. (Psalm xviii. 47.) In this his empire is illustrious; *The Lord sitteth upon the floods, yea, the Lord sitteth King for ever*, (Psalm xxix. 10); a King impossible to be deposed; not only on the natural floods of the sea, that would naturally overflow the world; but the metaphorical floods or tumults of the people, the sea in every wicked man's heart, more apt to rage morally than the sea to foam naturally.

When you see the cunningest designs baffled by some small thing intervening; when you see men of profound wisdom infatuated, mistake their way, and *grope in the noon-day as in the night*, (Job v. 14), bewildered in a plain way; when you see the hopes of mighty attempters dashed into despair, their triumphs turned into funerals, and their joyful expectations into sorrowful disappointments; when you see the weak devoted to destruction victorious, and the most presumptuous defeated in their purposes, then read the divine dominion in the desola-

XI.—THE PATIENCE OF GOD.

DEFINED.

SLOWNESS to anger, or admirable patience, is the *property* of the divine nature. As patience signifies suffering, so it is not in God. The divine nature is impassible, incapable of any impair, it cannot be touched by the violences of men, nor the essential glory of it be diminished by the injuries of men ; but as it signifies a willingness to defer, and an unwillingness to pour forth his wrath upon sinful creatures ; he moderates his provoked justice, and forbears to revenge the injuries he daily meets with in the world. He suffers no grief by men's wronging him, but he restrains his arm from punishing them according to their merits ; and thus there is patience in every cross a man meets with in the world : because though it be a punishment, it is less than is merited by the unrighteous rebel, and less than may be inflicted by a righteous and powerful God.

DIFFERS FROM GOODNESS AND MERCY.

Patience is *part* of the divine goodness and mercy, yet *differs* from both. God being the greatest goodness, hath the greatest mildness ; mildness is always the companion of true goodness, and the greater the

goodness, the greater the mildness. Who so holy as Christ, and who so meek? God's slowness to anger is a branch of his mercy. The *Lord is full of compassion, slow to anger*. (Psalm cxlv. 8.) It differs from mercy in the formal consideration of the object; mercy respects the creature as miserable, patience respects the creature as criminal: mercy pities him in his misery, and patience bears with the sin, which engendered that misery, and is giving birth to more.

Goodness respects things in a capacity, or in a state of creation, and brings them forth into creation, and nurseth and supports them as creatures. Patience considers them already created, and fallen short of the duty of creatures; it considers them as sinners, or in relation to sinners. Had not sin entered, patience had never been exercised; but goodness had been exercised, had the creature stood firm in its created state without any transgression; nay, creation could not have been without goodness; because it was goodness to create: but patience had never been known without an object, which could not have been without an injury. Where there is no wrong, no suffering, nor like to be any, patience hath no prospect of any operation. So then goodness respects persons as creatures, patience as transgressors; mercy eyes men as miserable and obnoxious to punishment: patience considers men as sinful, and provoking to punishment.

Since it is a part of goodness and mercy, it is not an *insensible* patience. What is the fruit of pure goodness, cannot be from a weakness of resentment; he is slow to anger; the prophet does not say, he is incapable of anger, or cannot discern what is a real object of anger; it implies, that he doth consider every provocation, but he is not hasty to discharge his arrows upon the offenders; he sees all, while he bears with them: his omniscience excludes any

ignorance ; he cannot but see every wrong ; every aggravation in that wrong, every step and motion from the beginning to the completing it : for he knows all our thoughts ; he sees the sin, and the sinner at the same time, the sin with an eye of abhorrence, and the sinner with an eye of pity. His eye is upon their iniquities, and his hatred edged against them ; while he stands with arms open, waiting a penitent return.

IN DELAYING JUDGMENTS.

His patience is manifest, in *long delaying* his threatened judgments, though he finds no repentance in the rebels. He sometimes delays his lighter punishments, because he does not delight in torturing his creatures ; but he longer delays his destroying punishments, such as put an end to men's happiness, and remit them to their final and unchangeable state ; because he doth not *delight in the death of a sinner*. He scatters not his consuming fires at the first, but brings on ruining vengeance with a slow pace ; *Sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed*. (Eccles. viii. 11.) The Jews therefore say, that Michael, the minister of justice, flies with one wing, but Gabriel, the minister of mercy, with two. It was the tenth generation of the world from Adam, when the deluge overflowed it, so long did God bear with them. And the tenth generation from Noah wherein Sodom was consumed. The usual time in succeeding generations from the denouncing of judgments to the execution, is forty years : this some ground upon Ezek. iv. 6, *Thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days*, taking each day for a year. Though Hosea lived seventy years, yet from the beginning of his prophesying judgments against Israel, to the pouring them

out upon that idolatrous people, it was forty years. Hosea, prophesied against them in the days of Jeroboam the second, in whose time God did wonderfully deliver Israel. (2 Kings xiv. 26, 27.) From that time till the total destruction of the ten tribes it was forty years, as may easily be computed from the story, (2 Kings, chaps. xv. xvi. xvii.) by the reign of the succeeding kings. So forty years after the most horrid villainy that ever was committed in the face of the sun, viz. the crucifying the Son of God, was Jerusalem destroyed, and the inhabitants captived; so long did God delay a visible punishment for such an outrage. Sometimes he prolongs sending a threatened judgment upon a mere shadow of humiliation; so he did that denounced against Ahab.

IN HIS UNWILLINGNESS TO EXECUTE JUDGMENTS.

His patience is manifest in his *unwillingness to execute his judgments*, when he can delay no longer. *He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.* Heb. He doth not afflict from his heart. (Lam. iii. 33.) He takes no pleasure in it, as he is Creator. The height of men's provocations, and the necessity of the preserving his rights, and vindicating his laws, obligeth him to it, as he is the governor of the world. When he comes to strike, he does it with a sigh or groan. *Ah, I will ease me of my adversaries, and avenge me on my enemies.* (Isaiah i. 24.) אַה Ah, a note of grief. So Hosea vi. 4, *O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee?* As if God were troubled, that he must deal so sharply with them, and give them up to their enemies. I have tried all means to reclaim you, I have used all ways of kindness, and nothing prevails. What shall I do? My mercy invites me to spare

them, and their ingratitude provokes me to ruin them. God had borne with that people of Israel almost three hundred years, from the setting up of the calves at Dan and Bethel ; sent many a prophet to warn them, and spent many a rod to reform them. And when he comes to execute his threatenings, he does it with a conflict in himself. *How shall I give thee up, O Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel?* (Hosea xi. 8.) How often in former times, when he had signed a warrant for their execution, did he call it back ! *Many a time turned he his anger away.* (Psalm lxxviii. 38.) Many a time he recalled, or ordered his anger to *return again*, as the word signifies, as if he were irresolute what to do. He recalled it, as a man calls his servant several times, when he is sending him upon an unwelcome message ; or as a tender-hearted prince wavers, and trembles, when he is to sign a writ for the death of a rebel, that has been before his favourite ; as if when he had signed the writ, he blotted out his name again, and laid aside the pen. And his method is remarkable, when he came to punish Sodom ; though the cry of their sin had been fierce in his ears, yet when he comes to make inquisition, he declares his intention to Abraham, as if he were desirous that Abraham should have helped him to some arguments, to stop the outgoings of his judgment. He gave liberty to the best person in the world to stand in the gap, and enter into a treaty with him, to shew, saith one, how willingly his mercy would have compounded with his justice for their redemption. And Abraham interceded so long, till he was ashamed for pleading the cause of patience and mercy, to the wrong of the rights of divine justice. Perhaps had Abraham had the courage to ask, God would have had the compassion to grant a reprieve just at the time of execution.

UNDER PROVOCATIONS.

His slowness to anger infinitely transcends the patience of any creature ; nay, the spirits of all the angels and glorified saints in heaven, would be too narrow to bear the sins of the world for one day, nay, not so much as the sins of churches, which is a little spot in the whole world : it is because *he is the Lord*, one of infinite power over himself, that not only the whole mass of the rebellious world, but of the *sons of Jacob* (either considered as a church and nation springing from the loins of Jacob, or considered as the regenerate part of the world, sometimes called the seed of Jacob) *are not consumed*. (Mal. iii. 6.) A Jonah was angry with God for recalling his anger from a sinful people ; had God committed the government of the world to the glorified saints, who are perfect in love and holiness, the world would have had an end long ago ; they would have acted that which they sue for at the hands of God, and is not granted them. *How long, Lord, holy and true, dost thou not avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth ?* (Rev. vi. 10.)

God hath designs of patience above the world, above the unsinning angels, and perfectly renewed spirits in glory. The greatest created long-suffering is infinitely disproportioned to the divine ; fire from heaven would have been showered down before the greatest part of a day were spent, if a created patience had the conduct of the world, though that creature were possessed with the spirit of patience, extracted from all the creatures which are in heaven, or are, or ever were upon the earth. Methinks Moses intimates this ; for as soon as God had passed by, proclaiming his name *gracious, and long-suffering* ; as soon as ever Moses had paid his adoration, he

prays that God would go with the Israelites ; *For it is a stiff-necked people*, (Exod. xxxiv. 8, 9) : what an argument is here for God to go along with them ! He might rather, since he had heard him but just before say, he would *by no means clear the guilty*, desire God to stand further off from them, for fear the fire of his wrath should burst out from him, to burn them as he did the Sodomites. But he considers, that as none but God had such anger to destroy them, so none but God had such a patience to bear with them ; it is as much as if he should have said, Lord ! if thou shouldest send the most tender-hearted angel in heaven to have the guidance of this people, they would be a lost people ; a period will quickly be set to their lives, no created strength can restrain its power from crushing such stiff-necked people ; flesh and blood cannot bear them, nor any created spirit of a greater might.

TO THE ENEMIES OF HIS CHURCH.

Well may the church be content to have a perfection of God glorified, that is not like to receive any honour in another world by any exercise of itself. If it were not for this patience, he were incapable to be the Governor of a sinful world ; he might without it be the Governor of an innocent world, but not of a criminal one ; he would be the destroyer of the world, but not the orderer and disposer of the extravagances and sinfulness of the world. The interest of his wisdom in drawing good out of evil, would not be served, if he were not clothed with this perfection as well as with others. If he presently destroyed the enemies of his church upon the first oppression, his wisdom in contriving, and his power in accomplishing deliverance, against the united powers of hell and earth, would not be visible ; no

nor that power in preserving his people unconsumed in the furnace of affliction. He had not got so great a name in the rescue of his Israel from Pharaoh, had he destroyed in thunder the tyrant upon his first edicts against the innocent. If he were not patient to the most violent of men, he might seem to be cruel. But when he offers peace to them under their rebellions, waits that they may be members of his church, rather than enemies to it; he frees himself from any such imputation, even in the judgment of those that shall feel most of his wrath; it is this renders the equity of his justice unquestionable, and the deliverance of his people righteous in the judgment of those from whose fetters they are delivered. Christ reigns in the midst of his enemies, to shew his power over himself; as well as over the heads of his enemies, to shew his power over his rebels.

TO THE REGENERATE.

We see the reason why sin is suffered *to remain in the regenerate*: to shew his patience towards his own; for since this attribute hath no other place of appearance but in this world, God takes opportunity to manifest it; because at the close of the world, it will remain closed up in the Deity, without any further operation. As God suffers a multitude of sins in the world, to evidence his patience to the wicked, so he suffers great remainders of sin in his people, to shew his patience to the godly. His sparing mercy is admirable, before their conversion, but more admirable in bearing with them after so high an obligation, as the conferring upon them special converting grace.

USE FOR EXHORTATION.

The frequent consideration of his patience would render God *highly amiable* to us. It is a more endearing argument, than his mere goodness; his goodness to us as creatures, endowing us with such excellent faculties, furnishing us with such a commodious world, and bestowing upon us so many attendants for our pleasure and service, and giving us a lordship over his other works, deserves our affection. But his patience to us as sinners after we have merited the greatest wrath, shews him to be of a sweeter disposition, than creating goodness to unoffending creatures; and consequently speaks a greater love in him, and bespeaks a greater affection from us. His creating goodness discovers the majesty of his being, and the greatness of his mind, but this the sweetness and tenderness of his nature. In this patience he exceeds the mildness of all creatures to us; and therefore should be enthroned in our affections above all other creatures. The consideration of this would make us love him for his nature, as well as for his benefits.

If we should often ask our consciences why have we done thus and thus against so mild a God, would not the reflection on it, put us to the blush? If men would consider, that such a time they provoked God to his face, and yet have not felt his sword; such a time they blasphemed him, and made a reproach of his name, and his thunder did not stop their motion; such a time they fell into an abominable brutishness, yet he kept the punishment of devils, the unclean spirits from reaching them; such a time he bore an open affront from them, when they scoffed at his word, and he did not send destruction and "laugh at their calamity." Would not

such a meditation work some strange kind of relentings in men? What if we should consider, that we cannot do a sinful act without the support of his concurring providence? We cannot see, hear, move without it. All creatures we use for our necessity or pleasure, are supported by him in the very act of assisting to pleasure us: and when we abuse those creatures against him, which he supports for our use, how great is his patience to bear with us, that he does not annihilate those creatures, or at least embitter their use?

We should admire and praise that here, which shall be praised in heaven; though patience shall cease, as to its exercise, after the consummation of the world, it shall not cease from receiving the acknowledgments of what it did when it traversed the stage of this earth. If the name of God be glorified and acknowledged in heaven, no question but this will also; since *long-suffering* is one of his divine titles, a letter in his name, as well as *merciful and gracious, abundant in goodness and truth*. If Paul speak so highly of it in a discouraging world, and under the weight and hindrances of a body of death, as he doth; *For this cause I obtained mercy, that Christ might shew forth all long-suffering; now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only-wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen*, (1 Tim. i. 16, 17); no doubt but he will have a higher note for it, when he is surrounded with a heavenly flame, and freed from all remains of dulness. Shall it be praised above, and have we no notes for it here below?

**ON THE ATTRIBUTES
OF GOD,**

&c. &c.

BY WILLIAM BATES, D. D.

ON THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD,

&c. &c.

MAN'S ORIGINAL CONFORMITY TO GOD.

GOD, who is the living Fountain of all perfections, spent an entire eternity in the contemplation of his own excellences, before any creature was made. In the moment appointed by his wisdom, he gave the first being to the world. Three distinct orders of creatures he formed, the one purely spiritual, the other purely material, and between both one mixed, which unites the extremes in itself. This is man, the midgment of the universe, allied to the angels in his soul, and to material things in his body, and capable of the happiness of both; by his internal faculties enjoying the felicity of the intellectual, and by his external tasting the pleasures of the sensitive world. Man's greatest excellency was a perfect conformity to the divine pattern. *God created man in his own likeness, in the image of God created he him.*

The holiness of man was the copy of the divine

purity ; his happiness a representation of the divine felicity ; and his dominion over the lower world the resemblance of God's sovereignty.

Holiness and righteousness are the comprehensive sum of the moral law, which not only represents the will but the nature of God in his supreme excellency, and in conformity to it the divine likeness eminently appeared. Adam was created with the perfection of grace ; the progress of the most excellent saints is incomparably short of his beginning ; by this we may in part conjecture at the beauty of holiness in him, of which one faint ray appearing in renewed persons is so amiable.

His knowledge reached through the whole compass of the creation, from the sun, the glorious vessel of light, to the glowworm that shines in the hedge. And this knowledge was not acquired by study, it was not the fruit of anxious inquiry, but as the illumination of the air is in an instant by the light of the morning, so his understanding was enlightened by a pure beam from the Father of lights.

When he first opened his eyes, the stupendous fabric of heaven and earth presented itself to his view, and in it the most express and clear characters of that glorious Power which produced it.

Infinite goodness shined forth in the creation. This is the leading attribute, that called forth the rest to work. As there was no matter, so no motive to induce God to make the world, but what arose from his goodness : for he is an all-sufficient Being, perfectly blessed in himself. His majesty is not increased by the adoration of angels, nor his greatness by the obedience of nature ; neither was he less happy, or content, in that eternal duration before the existence of any creature, than he is since. His original felicity is equally incapable of accession, as of diminution. It is evident, therefore, that *only free and unexcited* goodness moved him to create all

things, that he might impart being and happiness to the creature, not enrich his own.

And as by contemplating the other works of God, so especially by reflecting upon himself, Adam had a clear sight of the divine attributes which concurred in his creation. Whether he considered his lowest part, the body, it was formed of the earth, the most artificial and beautiful piece of the visible world. The contrivance of its parts was with that proportion and exactness, as most conduced to comeliness and service. Its stature was erect and raised, becoming the Lord of the creatures, and an observer of the heavens. A divine beauty and majesty was shed upon it. And this was no vanishing ray, soon eclipsed by a disease, and extinguished by death, but shined in the countenance without any declination. The tongue was man's peculiar glory, being the interpreter of the mind, and capable to signify all the affections of the soul. In short, the body was so framed, as to make a visible discovery of the prerogatives of his creation. And when he reflected upon his soul that animated his dust, its excellent endowments wherein it is comparable to the angels, its capacity of enjoying God himself for ever, he had an internal and most clear testimony of the glorious perfections of his Creator. For man, who alone admires the works of God, is the most admirable of all.

The image of God was resplendent in man's conscience, the seat of practical knowledge, and treasury of moral principles.

There was a divine impression on the will. Spiritual reason kept the throne, and the inferior faculties observed an easy and regular subordination to its dictates. The affections were exercised with proportion to the quality of their objects. Reason was their inviolable rule. Love the most noble, and master-affection, which gives being and goodness to

all the rest, even to hatred itself, (for so much we hate an object, as it hinders our enjoyment of the good we love,) this precious incense was offered up to the excellent and supreme Being, which was the author of his life. Adam fully obeyed the first and great command, of loving the Lord with all his heart, soul, and strength. His love to other things was regulated by his love to God. There was a perfect accord between flesh and spirit in him. They both joined in the service of God, and were naturally moved to their happiness. As the two eyes consent in their motion, so reason and sense agreed for the same end. In short, the image of God in Adam was a living, powerful principle, and had the same relation to the soul which the soul hath to the body, to animate and order all its faculties, in their offices and operations, according to the will of his Creator.

He enjoyed nature in its original purity, crowned with the benediction of God, before it was blasted with the curse. The world was all harmony and beauty, becoming the goodness of the Creator; and not as it is since the fall, disordered and deformed in many parts, the effect of his justice. The earth was liberal to Adam of all its treasures; the heavens of their light, and sweetest influences. He was seated in Eden, a place of so great beauty and delight, that it represented the celestial Paradise which is refreshed with rivers of pleasure. And as the ultimate end of the creatures was to raise his mind, and inflame his heart with the love of his great Benefactor; so their first and natural use was the satisfaction of the senses, from whence the felicity of the animal life did proceed.

As the desire of knowledge is the most natural to the human soul, so the obtaining of it produces the most noble and sweetest pleasure. And though his finite understanding could not comprehend the divine excellences, yet his knowledge was answer-

ble to the degrees of revelation wherein God was manifested. He saw the admirable beauty of the Creator through the transparent veil of the creatures. And from hence there arose in the soul a pleasure pure, solid, and satisfying, a pleasure divine; for God takes infinite contentment in the contemplation of himself.

Now as Adam had a perfect knowledge of God, so the height of his love was answerable to his knowledge, and the completeness of his enjoyment was according to his love. All the divine excellences were amiable to him. The majesty, purity, justice, and power of God, which are the terror of guilty creatures, secured his happiness whilst he continued in his obedience. His conscience was clear and calm, no unquiet fears discomposed its tranquillity, it was the seat of innocence and peace.

THE FALL OF MAN.

Man was created perfectly holy, but in a natural, therefore mutable state. He was invested with power to prevent his falling; yet under a possibility of it. He was complete in his own order, but receptive of sinful impressions. An invincible perseverance in holiness belongs to a supernatural state; it is the privilege of grace, and exceeds the design of the first creation.

The moral harmony of the world consists in the just subordination of the several ranks of beings to one another, and of all to God. When man, who was placed next to God, broke the union, his fall brought a desperate disorder into God's government.

And though the matter of the offence seems small, yet the disobedience was infinitely great; it being the transgression of that command, which was given

to be the instance and real proof of man's subjection to God.

From the deception of the mind proceeded the depravation of the will, the intemperance of the appetite, and the defection of the whole man. Thus as the natural, so the spiritual death made its first entrance by the eye. And this infidelity is extremely aggravated, as it implies an accusation of God both of envy and falshood.

Of envy : as if he had denied them the perfections becoming the human nature ; and they might ascend to a higher orb than that wherein they were placed, by eating the forbidden fruit. And what greater disparagement could there be of the divine goodness, than to suspect the Deity of such a low and base passion, which is the special character of the angels of darkness.

It was equally injurious to the honour of God's truth. For it is not easy to conceive that Adam who was so lately the effect of God's omnipotence should presently distrust it as unable to inflict the punishment threatened, but his assent was weakened as to the truth of the threatening : he did not believe the danger to be so great or certain upon his disobedience. And he that believes not God, makes him a liar. An impiety not to be thought on without horror. And that which heightens the affront, is, that when he distrusted the Fountain of truth, he gave credit to the father of lies, as appears by his compliance the real evidence of his faith. Now what viler contumely could be offered to the Creator?

He was scarce out of the state of nothing, no sooner created, but he aspired to be as God. Not content with his image, he affected an equality, to be like him in his inimitable attributes. He would rob God of his eternity to live without end ; of his sovereignty, to command without dependence ; of his wisdom, to know all things without reserve. Infinite

insolence! and worthy of the most fiery indignation! That man, the son of the earth, forgetful of his original, should usurp the prerogatives which are essential to the Deity, and set up himself a real idol, was a strain of that arrogancy which corrupted the angels.

The use of all the garden was allowed to him, only a tree excepted. Now, in the midst of such variety and plenty, to be inflamed with the intemperate appetite of the forbidden fruit, and to break a command so equal and easy, what was it but a despising the rich goodness of his great Benefactor? Besides, man was endued with a diviner spirit than the inferior order of creatures: reason and liberty were the special privileges of his nature, and to abuse them to rebellion renders him as more unreasonable, so more disingenuous than the creatures below him, who inflexibly obey the will of God.

The prohibition was so express and terrible, that till he had cast off all respects to the Lawgiver, it was not possible he should venture to disobey him. The sin of Adam is therefore called by the apostle disobedience, as eminently such; it being the first and highest instance of it, and virtually a breach of all the laws at once in that contempt of the Lawgiver. It was the profanation of Paradise itself, the place of God's special presence. There he fell, and trampled on God's command before his face. What just cause of astonishment is it, that a reasonable creature should bid open defiance to the Author of its life! That a little breathing dust should condemn its Creator! That man should prefer servile compliance to the will of the tempter, before free subjection to his Father and Sovereign! To depose God and place the devil in his throne, was double treason, and provoked his infinite jealousy.

That the pleasures of taste and curiosity should outvie the favour of God, which is better than life;

that the most pernicious evil, gilded with the thin appearance of good, should be preferred before the substantial and supreme Good, is the reproach of his reason, and makes the choice so criminal. And what less than voluntary madness could incline him to desire that, which he ought infinitely to have feared, that is, the knowledge of evil? for nothing could destroy his happiness but the experience of evil. What but a wilful distraction could induce him to believe, that by defacing God's image he should become more like him?

When God had made him a depository in a matter of infinite moment, that is, of his own happiness, and all mankind's, this should have been a powerful motive to have kept him vigilant. But giving a ready ear to the tempter, he betrayed his trust, and at once breaks both the tables of the law, and becomes guilty of the highest impiety and cruelty. He was a murderer before a parent, he disinherited all his children before they were born, and made them slaves before they knew the price of liberty.

Now that man, so richly furnished with all the perfections of the mind, and the excellent virtues of which original righteousness was composed; that endued with knowledge to foresee the incomparable evil that would redound to himself, and the universal to his posterity by his disobedience; that being so well tempered in his constitution that all his appetites were subject to reason; that notwithstanding these preservatives, he should be deceived by the false persuasion of an erring mind, and overcome by carnal concupiscence, as the evil effects of it will not cease to the end of the world, so neither the just wonder how it was possible to happen. These are the circumstances which derive a crimson guilt to his rebellious sin, and render it above measure sinful.

His soul degenerated from its purity; the faculties

remained, but the moral perfections were lost wherein the brightness of God's image was most conspicuous. The holy wisdom of his mind, the divine love that sanctified his will, the spiritual power to obey God were totally quenched.

He was deprived of his dominion and liberty. The understanding was so wounded by the violence of the fall, that not only its light is much impaired, but its power is so weakened as to the lower faculties, that those which according to the order of nature should obey, have cast off its just authority and usurp the government. The will hath lost its true freedom, whereby it was enlarged to the extent and amplitude of the divine will, in loving whatsoever was pleasing to God, and is contracted to mean and base objects. What a furious disorder is in the affections. The restraint of reason to check their violent course provokes them to swell higher, and to be more impetuous, and the more they are gratified, the more insolent and outrageous they grow.

The senses, whose office is to be the intelligencers of the soul, to make discovery, and to give a naked report without disturbing the higher faculties, sometimes mistake disguised enemies for friends; and sometimes by a false alarm move the lower appetites, and fill the soul with disorder and confusion, that the voice of reason cannot be heard. By the irritation of grief, the insinuation of pleasure, or some other perturbation, the soul is captivated and wounded through the senses. In short, when man turned rebel to God, he became a slave to all the creatures.

Adam, whilst obedient, enjoyed peace with God, a sweet serenity of mind, a divine calm in the conscience, and full satisfaction in himself. But after his sin, he trembled at God's voice, and was tormented at his presence. *I heard thy voice, and was afraid*, saith guilty Adam. He looked on God as

angry, and armed against him, ready to execute the severe sentence. Conscience began an early hell within him; Paradise, with all its pleasures, could not secure him from that sting in his breast, and that sharpened by the hand of God. What confusion of thoughts, what a combat of passions was he in? When the temptation which deceived him vanished, and his spirit recovered out of the surprise, and took a clear view of his guilt in its true horror, what indignation did it kindle in his breast? How did shame, sorrow, revenge, despair, those secret executioners torment his spirit.

The angels, with flaming swords, expelled him from Paradise. The beasts, who were all innocent whilst man remained innocent, espouse God's interest, and are ready to revenge the quarrel of their Creator. The insensible creation, which at first was altogether beneficial to man, is become hurtful. The heavens sometimes are hardened as brass in a long and obstinate serenity; sometimes are dissolved in a deluge of rain; the earth is barren, and unfaithful to the sower, it brings forth thorns and thistles instead of bread. In short, man is an enemy to man. When there were but two brothers to divide the world, the one stained his hands in the blood of the other. And since the progeny of Adam is increased into vast societies, all the disasters of the world, as famine, pestilence, deluges, the fury of beasts have not been so destructive of mankind, as the sole malignity of man against those that partake of the human nature.

To conclude, who can make a list of the evils to which the body is liable by the disagreeing elements that compose it? The fatal seeds of corruption are bred in itself. It is a prey to all diseases from the torturing stone to the dying consumption. It feels the strokes of death a thousand times before it can die once. At last, life is swallowed up of death.

And if death were a deliverance from miseries, it would lessen its terror, but it is the consummation of all. The first death transmits to the second. As the body dies by the soul's forsaking it, so the soul by separation from God, its true life, dies to its well-being and happiness for ever.

DIVINE WISDOM IN MAN'S REDEMPTION.

God, by his infallible prescience, (to which all things are eternally present,) viewing the fall of Adam, and that all mankind lay bleeding in him, out of deep compassion to his creature, and that the devil might not be finally victorious over him, in his counsel decreed the recovery of man from his languishing and miserable state. The design and the means are most worthy of God, and in both his wisdom appears.

As some stars shine with a different glory, so there are some noble effects, wherein the divine attributes are so conspicuous, that in compare with them, the rest of God's works are but obscure expressions of his greatness. The principal are creation and redemption. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament his handy-work.* And when God surveyed the whole creation, and *saw that all which he had made was good*, he ordained a Sabbath, to signify the content and satisfaction he had in the discovery of his eternal perfections therein.

But especially his glory is most resplendent in the work of redemption, wherein more of the divine attributes are exercised than in the creation, and in a more glorious manner. It is here that wisdom, goodness, justice, holiness, and power, are united in their highest degree and exaltation. Upon this account the apostle useth that expression, *The glorious gospel of the blessed God.* It being the clearest

revelation of his excellent attributes, the unspotted mirror wherein the great and wonderful effects of the Deity are set forth.

It will be the eternal exercise of the saints in heaven, where they more fully understand the mystery of our redemption, and consider every circumstance that may add a lustre to it, to ascribe *blessing, honour, glory, and power to him that sits on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.*

Sin hath broken that sacred alliance which was between God and man; and exposed him to his just displeasure. A misery inconceivable. And what is more becoming God, who is the Father of Mercies, than to glorify his dear attribute, and that which in a peculiar manner characterizes his nature, by the salvation of the miserable? What is more honourable to him, than by his almighty mercy to raise so many monuments from the dust, wherein his goodness may live and reign for ever?

That God, who is rich in goodness, should be favourable to the angels who serve him in perfect purity, we may easily conceive; for though they do not merit his favour, yet they never provoked his anger. And it is impossible but that he should love the image of his holiness wherever it shines.

Or suppose an innocent creature in misery, the divine mercy would speedily excite his power to rescue it; for God is love to all his creatures as such till some extrinsical cause intervenes, which God hates more than he loves the creature; and that is sin, which alone stops the effusion of his goodness, and opens a wide passage for wrath to fall upon the guilty. But how to save the creature that is undone by its own choice, and is as sinful as miserable, will pose the wisdom of the world. Heaven itself seemed to be divided. MERCY inclined to save, but JUSTICE interposed for satisfaction. MERCY regarded man with respect to his misery, and the pleas of it are,

Shall the Almighty build to ruin? Shall the most excellent creature in the lower world perish, the fault not being solely his? Shall the enemy triumph for ever, and raise his trophies from the works of the most High? Shall the reasonable creature lose the fruition of God, and God the subjection and service of the creature, and all mankind be made in vain? JUSTICE considered man as guilty of a transcendent crime, and it is its nature to render to every one what is due; now *the wages of sin is death*, and shall not the Judge of all the world do right? All the other attributes seemed to be attendants on justice. The WISDOM of God enforced its plea, it being most indecent that sin which provokes the execution, should procure the abrogation of the law; this would encourage the commission of sin without fear. The MAJESTY of God was concerned, for it was not becoming his excellent greatness to treat with defiled dust, and to offer pardon to a presumptuous rebel immediately after his offence, and before he made supplication to his Judge. The HOLINESS of God did quicken his justice to execute the threatening, *For he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*. As goodness is the essential object of his will, which he loves unchangeably wherever it is, so is sin the eternal object of his hatred, and where it is found in the love of it, renders the subject odious to him. *He will not take the wicked by the hand*. The law of contrariety forbids purity and pollution to mix together. And the VERACITY of God required the inflicting the punishment. For the law being a declaration of God's will, according to which he would dispense rewards and punishments, either it must be executed upon the offender, or if extraordinarily dispensed with, it must be upon such terms, as that the honour of God's truth may be preserved. This seeming conflict was between the attributes.

The sublimest *spirits in heaven* were at a loss how

to unravel the difficulty, and to find out the miraculous way to reconcile infinite mercy with inflexible justice; how to satisfy the demands of the one, and the requests of the other. God was to overcome himself before he restored man. In this exigence his mercy excited his wisdom to interpose as an arbiter, which, in the treasures of its incomprehensible light, found out an admirable expedient to save man, without prejudice to his other perfections. That was by constituting a Mediator, both able and willing, between the guilty creature and himself; that, by transferring the punishment on the Surety, he might punish sin, and pardon the sinner. And here, the more severe and rigorous justice is, the more admirable is the mercy that saves. In the same stupendous sacrifice he declared his respect to justice, and his delight in mercy. The two principal relations of our Redeemer are, the one of a gift from God to man, the other of an oblation from men to God. By the one, God satisfies his infinite love to man, and by the other satisfies his infinite justice for man. Neither is it unbecoming God to condescend in accepting the returning sinner, when a Mediator of infinite dignity intercedes for favour. The divine majesty is not lessened when *God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself*. Neither is the sanctity of God disparaged by his clemency to sinners, for the Redeemer is the principle and pattern of holiness to all that are saved. The same grace that inclined God to send his Son to die for us, gives his spirit to live in us, that we may be revived and renewed according to his image, and by conformity to God be prepared for communion with him. Here is a sweet concurrence of all the attributes, *Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace kiss each other*. Who can count up this heap of wonders? Who can unfold all the treasures of this mysterious love? The tongue of an angel

cannot explicate it according to its dignity: it is the fairest copy of the divine wisdom, the consummation of all God's counsels, wherein all the attributes are displayed in their brightest lustre: it is here *the manifold wisdom of God appears*. The angels of light bend themselves with extraordinary application of mind, and ardent affections, to study the rich and unsearchable variety that is in it. Only the same understanding comprehends it which contrived it. But as one that views the ocean, though he cannot see its bounds or bottom, yet sees so much as to know that that vast collection of waters is far greater than what is within the compass of his short sight: so though we cannot understand all the depths of that immense wisdom, which ordered the way of our salvation, yet we may discover so much, as to know with the apostle, that it surpasses knowledge. He that is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the light of the world, so illuminate our dark understandings, that we may conceive aright of this great mystery.

If the sentence had been inflicted, justice had been honoured with a solemn sacrifice, but mercy, the sweet, tender, and indulgent attribute, had never appeared. But now the wisdom of God is eminent in the accord of both these attributes. God is equally glorious, as equally God in preserving the authority of his law by an act of justice upon our Surety, as in the exercise of mercy by remitting the punishment to the offender.

The wisdom of God appeared in ordaining such a Mediator, who was qualified to reconcile God to man, and man to God. The first and most admirable article in the mystery of godliness, and the foundation of all the rest is, that *God is manifest in the flesh*. The middle must equally touch the extremes. A Mediator must be capable of the sentiments and affections of both the parties he will reconcile. He

must be a just esteemer of the rights and injury of the one and the other, and have a common interest in both. The Son of God, assuming the human nature, perfectly possesses these qualities, he has zeal for God, and compassion for man. He has taken pledges of heaven and earth; the superior nature in heaven, and the most excellent on earth, to make the hostility cease between them. He is Immanuel by nature and office. And if less than an inspired wisdom could devise how to frame the earthly tabernacle, wherein God dwelt in a shadowy and typical manner, what wisdom was requisite to frame the human nature of Christ wherein the Deity was really to dwell?

Now for the making expiation of sin, there was necessary concurrence of the two natures in our Redeemer. He must be man; for the Deity was not capable of those submissions and sufferings which were requisite to expiate sin. And he must be man that the sinning nature might suffer, and thereby acquire a title to the satisfaction that is made. The meritorious imputation of Christ's sufferings to man is grounded on the union between them, which is well natural in his partaking of flesh and blood, moral in the consent of their wills.

And as the human nature was necessary to qualify him for sufferings, and to make them suitable, so the divine was to make them sufficient. The lowly nature, considered in itself, could make no satisfaction. The dignity of the divine person makes a temporal punishment to be of an infinite value in God's account. Besides, the human nature had suffered under the weight of wrath, if the Deity had not been personally present to support it. Briefly, to perform the first part of his office, he must suffer, yet be impassible; die, yet be immortal; and undergo the wrath of God, to deliver man from it.

To make intercession for us, it was requisite that

he should partake of both natures, that he might have credit with God, and compassion to man. The Son hath a prevailing interest in the Father, as he testifies, *I know thou hearest me always*. A privilege which neither Abraham, Moses, nor any other who were the most favoured saints, enjoyed. And, as man, he was fit for passion and compassion. The human nature is the proper subject of feeling pity, especially when it hath felt misery. God is capable of love, not, in strictness, of compassion. For sympathy proceeds from an experimental sense of what one hath suffered, and the sight of the like affliction in others, revives the affections which were felt in that state, and inclines to pity. The apostle offers this to believers as the ground of comfort, that he who took our nature, and felt our griefs, intercedes for us. *For we have not an high-priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all things tempted as we are, yet without sin*; that with an humble confidence we may come to the throne of grace. He hath drunk deepest of the cup of sorrows, that he may be an all-sufficient Comforter to those that mourn. He hath such tender bowels, we may trust him to solicit our salvation. In short, it is the great support of our faith that *we have access to the Father by the Son*, and present all our requests by a Mediator so worthy and so dear to him, and by one who left the joys of heaven, that by enduring affliction on earth, his heart might be made tuneable to the hearts of the afflicted.

God, the great designer of all things, foreseeing the sufferings to which the godly would be exposed in the world, ordained it as most convenient that the Author of their deliverance should, by sufferings, obtain the reward, that by his example he might strengthen and deliver those that suffer to the end. Again, the Son of God entered into our family, and is not ashamed to call us brethren, to make his sceptre

amiable to us. He exerciseth his dominion with a natural and sensible touch of pity, he pardons our failings, and puts a value on our sincere though mean services, as an honour done to him. Briefly, in him there is a combination of power and love; the power of the Deity, with the tenderness and clemency of the human nature. *He is the mighty God and Prince of Peace. He is a King just and powerful against our enemies, but mild and gentle to his people.* He is willing to remove from us all the evils we cannot endure, our sins and sorrows; and able to convey to us all the blessings we are capable to enjoy. In all his glory, he remembers that he is our Saviour. At the day of judgment, when he shall come with a train of mighty angels, he will be as tender of man, as when he suffered on the cross. And from hence we may discover the excellency of God's contrivance in uniting the divine and human nature in our Redeemer, that he might have ability and affection to qualify him for that great and blessed work.

Who could more fitly restore us to favour, and the right of children, than the only-begotten and only-beloved Son, who is the singular and everlasting object of his Father's delight? Our relation to God is an imitation and expression of Christ's. He is a Son by nature, a servant by condescension; we are servants by nature, and sons by grace and favour. Our adoption into the line of heaven is by the purchase of his blood. The eternal Son *took flesh, and was made under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.* Who was more fit to repair the image of God in man, and beautify his nature, that was defiled with sin, than the Son who is *the express image of his Father's person*, and brightness and beauty itself? Who can better communicate the divine counsels to us, than the eternal word?

The wisdom of God appears in making the remedy

to have a proportion to the cause of our ruin; that as we fell in Adam our representative, so we are raised by Christ, the Head of our recovery. The apostle makes the comparison between the first and second Adam. As the disobedience of the first Adam is meritoriously imputed to all his natural posterity, and brings death upon all; so the righteousness of the second is meritoriously imputed to all his spiritual progeny, to obtain life for them. The carnal Adam having lost original righteousness, derives a corrupt nature to all that descend from him. And the spiritual having by his obedience purchased divine grace for us, (that being the price without which so rich a treasure as holiness could not be obtained,) conveys a vital efficacy to renew his people. The same spirit of holiness which anointed our Redeemer, doth quicken all his race, that as *they have borne the image of the earthly, they may bear the image of the heavenly Adam.*

The divine wisdom is visible in the manner whereby our redemption is accomplished; that is, by the humiliation of the Son of God. By this he did counterwork the sin of angels and man. Pride is the poison of every sin, for in every one the creature prefers his pleasure, and sets up his will above God's: but it was the special sin of Adam. The devil would have levelled heaven by an unpardonable usurpation; he said, I will be like the Most High: and man, infected with his breath, (you shall be like God,) became sick of the same disease. Now Christ, that by the quality of the remedy he might cure our disease in its source and cause, applied to our pride an unspeakable humility.

Man was guilty of the highest robbery in affecting to be equal with God; and the eternal Son, who was *in the form of God, and equal to him in majesty and authority*, without sacrilege or usurpation, emptied himself by assuming the human nature in its servile

state. *The Word was made flesh*, the meanest p specified, to signify the greatness of his abase There is such an infinite distance between Go flesh, that the condescension is as admirable : contrivance. So great was the malignity o pride, for the cure of which such a profound hu was requisite. By this he destroyed the first *of the devil*.

The divine wisdom appears in laying the of the gospel in such a manner, as to provide f comfort, and promote the holiness of man. 7 God's signature upon all heavenly doctrines, distinguishes them from carnal inventions, they a direct tendency to promote his glory, and th benefit of the rational creature: thus the way vation by Jesus Christ, is most fit as to rec God to man by securing his honour, so to rec man to God by encouraging his hope. Until t effected, he can never be happy in communion God; for that is nothing else but the reci exercise of love between God and the soul. nothing can represent God as amiable to a creature, but his inclination to pardon. V there are apprehensions of inexorable severity, will be hard thoughts burning in the breast a God; till the soul is released from terrors i never truly love him. To extinguish our hate must conquer our fears, and this he hath de giving us the most undoubted and convi evidence of his affections.

And what stronger security can be given, tha is ready to pardon man, upon his acceptin terms of the gospel, than the giving his Sor our atonement? If the stream swell so high overflow the banks, will it stop in a desce valley? Hath he, with so dear an expence, sa his justice, and will he deny his mercy to ing and returning sinners? This argume

powerful enough to overcome the most obstinate infidelity.

By the unspeakable gift of his Son, he assures our hopes of heaven, which is a reward so great and glorious, that our guilty hearts are apt to suspect we shall never enjoy it. We are secure of his faithfulness, having his infallible promise; and of his goodness, having such a pledge in our hands. As the apostle argues, *If he hath given us his Son, will he not with him give us all things?* Will he give us the tree of life, and not permit us to eat of its fruit? Is it conceivable, that having laid the foundation of our happiness in the death of his Son, an act to which his tender affection seemed so repugnant, that he will not perform the rest, which he can do by the mere signification of his will? It is an excellent encouragement St. Austin propounds from hence: *Securus esto accepturum te vitam ipsius, quæ pignus habes mortis ipsius, &c.* Be assured thou shalt partake of his life, who hast the pledge of it in his death. He hath performed more than he promised. It is more incredible that the eternal should die, than that a mortal creature should live for ever.

In short, since no mortal eye can discover the heavenly glory, to convince us of the reality of the invisible state, and to support our departing souls in their passage through the dark and terrible valley, our Saviour rose from the grave, ascended in our nature to heaven, and is the model of our happiness. He is at the right-hand of God to dispense life and immortality to all that believe on him. And what can be more comfortable to us, than the assurance of that blessedness, which as it eclipses all the glory of the world, so it makes death itself desirable in order to the enjoyment of it?

THE EXCELLENCE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE
GOSPEL.

What a superlative degree of praise and thankfulness is due to God, for revealing his eternal and compassionate counsel in order to our salvation? The fall of man was so wounding and deadly, that only an infinite understanding could find out the means for his recovery. And if that mercy which moved the Lord to ordain the remedy, had not discovered it, a thick cloud of despair had covered mankind, being for ever unable to conceive the way of our redemption. It is a mystery *which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of man to conceive.*

Though misery sharpens the mind, and makes it more ingenious to find out ways of deliverance, yet here reason was utterly at a loss. How could it ever enter into the thoughts of the Israelites that by erecting a brazen serpent on a pole, and looking towards it, the wounds made by the fiery serpent should be healed? And how could guilty man find out a way to satisfy infinite justice by the sufferings of a Mediator, and to heal the wounded spirit by believing on him? The most inquiring reason could never have thought of the wonders of the Incarnation, that a virgin should conceive, and a God be born; nor of the death of the Prince of life, and the resurrection, and ascension of the Lord of Glory.

Were the human understanding as clear as it is corrupt, yet it cannot by the strength of the discourse arrive to the knowledge of it. Supernatural revelation was necessary to discover it to the angels. The thoughts of men are a secret, into which the Creator alone hath right to enter, it being his prerogative to search the heart. The angels conjecture only, from the dispositions of men, from outward circumstances,

from the images in the fancy, and from material impressions on the blood and spirits, what are the thoughts of the heart: and much less can they discover the counsel of God himself. The apostle tells us *to principalities and powers in heavenly places, by the church the manifold wisdom of God is made known*. By the first coming of Christ, and the conversion of the world, the depths of the divine wisdom were opened, and there remains much undiscovered, which his second coming shall gloriously make known. Before the first they understood not the foundation, till the second not the perfection of our recovery. Briefly, the *Spirit that searches the mysterious counsels of God*, is the alone intelligencer of heaven, that reveals them to the world.

What a flood of errors and miseries covered the earth, when the *grace of God that brings salvation first appeared!* The deluge was universal, and so was the destruction. Those that were most renowned for wisdom, the philosophers of Greece, and the orators of Rome, were swallowed up, only the church of Christ is triumphant over the merciless waters. When Noah, from the top of the mountain, saw the sad remains of that dreadful inundation, what a lively sense of joy possest his breast! As misery is heightened, so happiness is set off by comparison. Not that there is any regular content to see the destruction of others; but the sense of our own preservation from a common ruin, raises our joy to its highest elevation. The first work of Noah after his deliverance was to build an altar on which to offer the sacrifices of thanksgiving to his preserver. We should imitate his example.

How many nations unknown to our world remain in the darkness, and shadow of death, now the day-spring from on high hath visited us! This special favour calls for special thankfulness. Were there any qualities in us to incline God to prefer us before

others, it would lessen our esteem of the benefit. But this distinguishing mercy is one of those free acts of God, for which there is no reason in the objects on which they are exercised. St. Austin calls it, *profundum crucis*. As the lowest part of the cross is under ground unseen, but the upper part is exposed to sight ; so the effects of divine predestination, the fruits of the cross, are visible, but the reasons are not within our view. How can we reflect on our spiritual obligations to divine grace without a rapture of soul ? The corruption of nature was universal, our ignorance as perverse, and our manners as profane as of other nations, and we had been condemned to an eternal night, if the light of life had not graciously shined upon us. This should warm our hearts in affectionate acknowledgments to God, *who hath made known to us the riches of the glory of this mystery amongst the Gentiles ;* and with that revelation the concomitant power of the Spirit, to translate us *from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear son.*

In the creation his footsteps appear, in our redemption his image. In the law his justice and holiness, but in the gospel all his perfections shine forth in their brightest lustre. The bare theory of this enriches the mind, and the contemplation of it affects the soul, that is conversant about it, with the highest admiration and the most sincere and lasting delight.

The strongest spirits cannot comprehend its just greatness : the understanding sinks under the weight of glory. The apostle who had seen the light of heaven, and had such knowledge as never any man before ; yet upon considering one part of the divine wisdom, breaks forth in astonishment, *Oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God : how unsearchable are his decrees, and his ways past finding out !*

The gospel is called a marvellous light, upon the account of the objects it discovers. But such a per-

so judgment is in men, that they neglect those things which deserve the highest admiration, and find their wonder on meaner things. Art is more admired than nature: a counterfeit eye of crystal, which has neither sight nor motion, than the living sun, the sun of the little world, that directs the whole nature. And the effects of nature are more admired in the sublime and supernatural works of grace. These infinitely exceed the other. The world is the work of God's hand, but the gospel is his plot, the chiefest of all his ways. What a combination of wonders is there in the great mystery of godliness! That he who fills heaven and earth should be confined to the virgin's womb; that life should die, and being dead revive; that mercy should triumph without any disparagement to justice: these are wonders that transcend all that is done in nature. The most exact insight into natural things leaves the mind blind and poor, ignorant of happiness, and weary to it. Solomon who had an extraordinary measure of natural knowledge, and was able to set a great price upon it, tells us that the *increase of knowledge was attended with proportionable degrees of sorrow*. The more a man knows, the more he discerns the insufficiency of that knowledge to supply his defects, and satisfy his desires. He was therefore weary of wisdom, as well as of his folly. The devils know more than the profoundest philosophers, yet their knowledge does not alleviate their torments. It is not only insufficient to prevent misery, but will more expose to it by enlarging the faculties, and making man more capable of torment. It is the observation of St. Ambrose, that when God discovered the creation of the world to Moses, he did not inform him of the greatness of the heavens, the number of the stars, their aspects and influences: whether they derive their light from the sun, or have it inherent in their own bodies; from whence eclipses are caused; how

the rainbow is painted, how the winds fly in the air, or the causes of the ebbing and flowing of the sea: but so much as might be a foundation of faith and obedience, and left the rest, *quasi marcescentis sapientiae vanitates*, as the vanities of perishing wisdom. The most knowing philosopher though encompassed with these sparks, yet if ignorant of the redeemer, shall lie down in sorrow for ever.

The wisdom of the world is folly in a disguise, a specious ignorance, which although it may secure the temporal state, yet it leaves us naked and exposed to spiritual enemies *who war against the soul*. And all the moral knowledge which is treasured up in the books of the heathens, is insufficient to restore man to his original integrity and felicity. Reason sees that man is ignorant, and guilty, mortal, and miserable, that he is transported with vain passions, and tormented with accusations of conscience, but it could not redress these evils. Corrupt nature is like an imperfect building that lies in rubbish, the imperfection is visible, but not the way how to finish it: for through ignorance of the first design, every one follows his own fancy, whereas when the architect comes to finish his own project, it appears regular and beautiful.

God who created man for the enjoyment of himself, hath happily accomplished his eternal decree, by the work of our redemption, wherein his own glory is most visible. And the gospel which reveals this to us, humbles whom it justifies, and comforts those that were condemned: it abases more than the law, but without despair, and advances more than nature could, but without presumption. The Mediator takes away the guilt of our old sins, and our inclination to new sins: we are not only restored, but exalted, made *heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ*. For these reasons the apostle sets so high a value upon the heavenly doctrine, that reveals a Saviour to the

undone world. *He desired to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.* He despiseth all pharisaical and philosophical learning, in comparison of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. Other knowledge swells the mind and increases the esteem of ourselves, this gives us a sincere view of our state. It discovers our misery in its causes, and the Almighty mercy that saves us. Other knowledge enlightens the understanding, without changing the heart, but this inspires us with the love of God, with the hatred of sin, and makes us truly better. In seeking after other knowledge, the mind is perplexed by endless inquiries: here it is at rest, as the wavering needle is fixed when turned to its beloved star. Ignorance of other things may be without any real damage to us; for we may be directed by the skilful how to preserve life and estate. But this knowledge is absolutely necessary to justify, sanctify, and save us. All other knowledge is useless at the hour of death: then the richest stock of learning is lost, the vessel being split wherein the treasure was laid; but this pearl of inestimable price is both the ornament of our prosperity and the support of our adversity: a little ray of this is infinitely more desirable, than the light of all human sciences in their lustre and perfection.

And what an amazing folly is it, that men who are possest with an earnest passion of knowing, should waste their time and strength in searching after things, the knowledge of which cannot remove the evils that oppress them, and be careless of the saving knowledge of the gospel? Were there no other reason to diminish the esteem of earthly knowledge, but the difficulty of its acquisition, that error often surprises those who are searching after truth, this might check our intemperate pursuit of it. Sin hath not only shortened our understandings, but our lives, that we cannot arrive to the perfect discovery of in-

ferior objects. But suppose that one by his vast mind should comprehend all created things, from the centre of the earth to the circumference of the heavens, and were not savingly enlightened in the mystery of our redemption, with all his knowledge he would be a prey to Satan, and increase the triumphs of hell. The historian upbraids the Roman luxury, that with so much cost and hazard they should send to foreign parts, for trees that were beautiful but barren, and produced a shadow only without fruit. With greater reason we may wonder that men should, with the expense of their precious hours, purchase barren curiosities, which are unprofitable to their last end. How can a condemned criminal, who is in suspense between life and death, attend to study the secrets of nature and art, when all his thoughts are taken up how to prevent the execution of the sentence? And it is no less than a prodigy of madness, that men who have but a short and uncertain space allowed them to escape the wrath to come, should rack their brains in studying things impertinent to salvation, and neglect the knowledge of a Redeemer,—especially when there is so clear a revelation of him : *The righteousness of faith doth not command us to ascend to the heavens, or descend into the deep, to make a discovery of it, but the word is nigh us that discovers the certain way to a happy immortality.* Seneca, a philosopher and a courtier, valued his being in the world only upon this account, that he might contemplate the starry heaven. He only saw the visible beauty of the firmament, but was ignorant of the glory within it, and of the way that leads to it ; yet to our shame he speaks, that the sight of it made him despise the earth, and without the contemplation of the celestial bodies, he esteemed his continuance in the world not the life of a man, but the toil of a beast. But what transports had he been in, if he had been acquainted with the contri-

vance of our redemption, the admirable order of its parts, and the beauty that results from the composition of the whole? *But we that with open face may in the glass of the gospel behold the glory of the Lord, turn away our eyes from it to vanity.* Here the complaint is more just, *Ad sapientiam quis accedit? quis dignam judicat nisi quam in transitu noverit?* We content ourselves with slight and transient glances, but do not seriously and fixedly consider this blessed design of God, upon which the beginning of our happiness in this, and the perfection of it in the next life is built. Let us provoke ourselves by the example of the angels who are not concerned in this redemption as man is, for they continued in their fidelity to their Creator, and were always happy in his favour; and where there is no alienation between parties, reconciliation is unnecessary; yet they are students with us in the same book, and unite all their powers in the contemplation of this mystery: they are represented stooping to pry into these secrets, to signify their delight in what they know, and their desire to advance in the knowledge of them. With what intention then should we study the gospel, who are the subject and end of it?

The simple speculation of this glorious mystery will be of no profit without a real belief of it, and a cordial acceptance of salvation, upon the terms which the divine wisdom prescribes. The gospel requires the obedience of the understanding and of the will; unless it obtains a full possession of the soul, there is no saving efficacy derived from it. And such is the sublimity and purity of the object, that till reason is sanctified and subdued, it cannot sincerely entertain it.

As there must be a spirit of revelation to unveil the object, so of wisdom to enlighten the eye, that it may be prepared for the reception of it. As heaven is only seen by its own light, so Christ is by his own

spirit. Divine objects, and faith that discerns them, are of the same original and of the same quality. The natural understanding, as the effects declare, is like the funeral lamps which by the ancients were put into sepulchres, to guard the ashes of their dead friends, which shine so long as they are kept close, a thick moist vapour feeding them, and repairing what was consumed : but in opening the sepulchres, and exposing them to the free air, they presently faint and expire. Thus natural reason whilst conversant in things below, and watching with the dead, that is, in the phrase of the ancients, studying the books of men who have left the world, discovers something, although it is rather a twilight than clear : but when it is brought from the narrow sphere of things sensible, to contemplate the immensity of things spiritual and supernatural, its light declines, and is turned into darkness.

Though reason, enslaved by prejudice, and corrupted by passion, despises the gospel, yet when it is enlightened by faith, it discovers such a wise economy in it, that, were it not true, it would transcend the most noble created mind to invent it : it is so much above our most excellent thoughts, that no human understanding would ever attempt to feign it, with confidence of persuading the world into a belief of it. How is it possible that it should be contrived by natural reason, since no man can believe it sincerely when it is revealed, without a supernatural faith ?

Ignorance of the manner how divine mysteries exist, is no sufficient plea for infidelity, when the scripture reveals that they are. For reason that is limited and restrained, cannot frame a conception that is commensurate to the essence and power of God. This will appear more clearly by considering the mysterious excellences of the divine nature, the certainty of which we believe, but the manner we



cannot understand: as that his essence and attributes are the same, without the least shadow of composition; yet his wisdom and power are to our apprehensions distinct, and his mercy and justice in some manner opposite. That his essence is entire in all places, yet not terminated in any. That he is above the heavens, and beneath the earth, yet hath no relation of high or low, distant or near. That he penetrates all substances, but is mixed with none. That he understands, yet receives no ideas within himself; that he wills, yet hath no motion that carries him out of himself. That in him time hath no succession, that which is past is not gone, and that which is future is not to come. That he loves without passion, is angry without disturbance, repents without change. These perfections are above the capacity of reason fully to understand, yet essential to the deity. Here we must exalt faith, and abase reason. Thus in the mystery of the incarnation, that two such distinct natures should compose one person, without the confusion of properties, reason cannot reach unto, but it is clearly revealed in the word: here, therefore, we must obey, not inquire.

To believe only in proportion to our narrow conceptions, is to disparage the divine truth, and debase the divine power. We cannot know what God can do—he is omnipotent, though we are not omniscient: it is just we should humble our ignorance to his wisdom, *and that every lofty imagination and high thing, that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, should be cast down, and every thought captivated into the obedience of Christ.* It is our wisdom to receive the great mysteries of the gospel in their simplicity: for in attempting to give an exact and curious explication of them, the understanding, as in an hedge of thorns, the more it strives, the more it is wounded and entangled. *God's ways are as far above ours, and his thoughts above ours, as heaven is above the earth.* To reject

what we cannot comprehend, is not only to sin against faith, but against reason, which acknowledges itself *finite*, and unable to search out the *Almighty* to perfection.

Since the fall, the clearness of the human understanding is lost, and the light that remains is eclipsed by the interposition of sensual lusts. The carnal mind cannot out of ignorance, and will not from pride and other malignant habits, receive things spiritual. And from hence arise many suspicions and doubts (concerning supernatural verities), the shadows of darkened reason and of dying faith. If any divine mystery seems incredible, it is from the corruption of our reason, not from reason itself,—from its darkness, not its light. And as reason is obliged to correct the errors of sense, when it is deceived either by some vicious quality in the organ, or by the distance of the object, or by the falseness of the medium, that corrupts the image in conveying it: so it is the office of faith to reform the judgment of reason, when, either from its own weakness, or the height of things spiritual, it is mistaken about them. For this end supernatural revelation was given not to extinguish reason, but to redress it, and enrich it with the discovery of heavenly things. Faith is called wisdom and knowledge: it doth not quench the vigour of the faculty wherein it is seated, but elevates it, and gives it a spiritual perception of those things that are most distant from its commerce. It doth not lead us through a mist to the inheritance of the saints in light. Faith is a rational light.

Those that owe their Christianity merely to the felicity of their birth, without a sight of that transcendent excellency in our religion, which evidences that it came from heaven, are not true believers. He that absolves an innocent person for favour, without considering sufficient proofs

offered, though his sentence, be just, is an unjust judge.

Reason is an excellent instrument to distinguish those things which are of a divine original, from what is spurious and counterfeit. For sometimes that is pretended to be a mystery of religion, which is only the fruit of fancy, and that is defended by the sacred respect of faith, that reason ought not to violate, which is but a groundless imagination; so that we remain in an error, by the sole apprehension of falling into one, as those that die for fear of death. The Bereans are commended for their *searching the scriptures, whether the doctrines they heard* were consentaneous to them.

The richest ornament of the creature is humility, and the most excellent effect of it is the sense of the weakness of our understanding. This is the temper of soul that prepares it for faith: partly as it puts us on a serious consideration of those things which are revealed to us in the Word. Infidelity proceeds from the want of consideration, and nothing hinders that so much as pride: partly, as it stops all curious inquiries into those things which are unsearchable; and principally as it entitles to the promise, God will instruct and give grace to the humble. The knowledge of heaven, as well as the kingdom of heaven, is the inheritance of the poor in spirit. A greater progress is made in the knowledge and belief of these mysteries by humble prayer, than by the most anxious study. As at court, an hour of favour is worth a year's attendance. Man cannot acquire so much as God can give.

And as humility, so holiness prepares the soul for the receiving of supernatural truths. The understanding is clarified by the purification of the heart. It is not the difficulty and obscurity of things revealed, that is the real cause of infidelity, since men believe other things upon far less evidence; but it is

the prejudice of the lower faculties that hinders them. When all affections to sin are mortified, the soul is in the best disposition to receive divine revelation. *He that doth the will of God, shall know whether the doctrine of the gospel came from heaven.*

The Spirit of God is the alone-instructor of the spirit of man in these mysteries, so as to produce a saving belief of them. That knowledge is more clear and satisfying than we have by his teaching, than by our own learning. The rational mind may discern the literal sense of the propositions in the gospel, and may yield a naked assent to the truth of them; but without supernatural irradiation by the Spirit of Life, there can be no transforming and saving knowledge and belief of them. And as the vast expansion of air that is about us, doth not preserve life, but that part which we breathe in; so it is not the compass of our knowledge and belief (though it were equal to the whole revealed will of God,) that is vital to the soul, but that which is practised by us. The apostle saith, *Though he had the understanding of all mysteries, and all knowledge, and all faith, yet if it were not joined with love, the principle of obedience, it were unprofitable.*

The doctrine of the gospel clearly discovers its divine original. It is so reasonable in itself, and profitable to us, so sublime and elevated above man, yet hath such an admirable agreement with natural truths, it is so perfectly corresponding in all its parts; that without affected obstinacy no man can reject it. And if after the open revelation of it we are so stupid and wicked, as not to see its superlative excellency, and not to receive it with the faith, love, and obedience which is due to it; what contempt is this of that infinite wisdom which contrived the astonishing way of our salvation! What a reproach to the divine understanding, as if it had been employed from eternity about a matter of no moment,

and that deserves not our serious consideration and acceptance! The neglect of it will justly bring a more severe punishment than the hell of the uninstructed heathens, who are strangers to supernatural mysteries.

THE MERCY OF GOD IN MAN'S REDEMPTION.

Though all the divine attributes are equal as they are in God, (for one infinite cannot exceed another,) yet in their exercise and effects, they shine with a different glory. And mercy is represented in scripture with peculiar advantages above the rest. It is God's natural offspring; he is styled *the Father of mercies*. It is his dear attribute, that which he places next to himself, he is proclaimed the *Lord God gracious and merciful*. It is his delight, *mercy pleases him*. It is his treasure, *he is rich in mercy*. It is his triumphant attribute, and the special matter of his glory, *mercy rejoices over judgment*. Now in the performance of our redemption, mercy is the predominant attribute, that sets all the rest a working. The acts of his wisdom, justice, and power, were in order to the illustration of his mercy. And if we duly consider that glorious work, we shall find in it all the ingredients of the most sovereign mercy.

This is the special commendation of divine love; it doth not arise out of indigency, as created love, but out of fulness and redundancy. Our Saviour tells us there is *none good but God*; not only in respect of the perfection of that attribute, as it is in God in a transcendant manner, but as to the effects of his goodness, which are merely for the benefit of the receiver. He is only rich in mercy, to whom nothing is wanting, or profitable. The most liberal monarch doth not always give, for he stands in need of his subjects. And where there is an expectation

of service for the support of the giver, it is traffic, and no gift. Human affection is begotten, and nourished by something without, but the love of God is from within: the misery of the creature is the occasion, but the cause of it is from himself. And how free was that love, that caused the infinitely-blessed God to do so much for our recovery, as if his felicity were imperfect without ours!

The freeness of God's mercy is evident by considering there was no tie upon him to dispense it. Grace, strictly taken, differs from love: for that may be a debt, and without injustice not denied. There are inviolable obligations on children to love their parents; and duty lessens desert: the performance of it doth not so much deserve praise, as the neglect merits censure and reproof. But the love of God to man is a pure, free, and liberal affection, no way due. *The grace of God, and the gift by grace, hath abounded unto many.* The creation was an effusion of goodness, much more redemption. *Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created.* It is grace that gave being to the angels, with all the prerogatives that adorn their natures: it is grace confirmed them in their original integrity. For God owes them nothing, and they are nothing to him. It was grace that placed Adam in Paradise, and made him as a visible God in the lower world. And if grace alone dispensed benefits to innocent creatures, much more to those who are obnoxious to justice: the first was free, but this is merciful.

In the creation, as there was no object to invite, so nothing repugnant to man's being and happiness: the dust of the earth did not merit such an excellent condition as it received from the pure bounty of God, but there was no moral unworthiness. But the grace of the gospel hath a different object, the wretched

and unworthy, and it produces different operations, it is healing and medicinal, ransoming and delivering, and hath a peculiar character among the divine attributes. It is goodness that crowns the angels, but it is mercy, the sanctuary of the guilty, and refuge of the miserable, that saves man. The scripture hath consecrated the name of grace in a special manner, to signify the most excellent and admirable favour of God in recovering us from our justly deserved misery. *We are justified freely by his grace: by grace we are saved: grace and truth is come by Jesus Christ: it is the grace of God that brings salvation.*

The love of God makes us amiable, but did not find us so. Redemption is a free favour, not excited by the worth of him that receives it, but the grace of him that dispenses it. There was not the least spark of love in man to God; notwithstanding his infinite beauty and bounty to us, yet we renewed acts of hostility against him every day. And it was the worst kind of hostility, arising from the hatred of God, and that for his holiness his most amiable perfection: yet then in his love he pitied us. The same favour bestowed on an enemy, is morally more valuable than given to a friend. For it is love that puts a price on benefits; and the more undeserved they are, the more they are endeared by the affection that gives them. *Here is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins.* We were rebels against God, and at enmity with the Prince of Life, yet then he gave himself for us.

It will further appear that our salvation comes from pure favour, if we consider man not only as a rebellious enemy to God, but impotent and obstinate, without power to resist justice, and without affection to desire mercy. Sometimes the interest of a prince may induce him to spare the guilty, he may be compelled to pardon, whom he cannot punish. The

multitude is the greatest potentate. The sons of Zeruiah were too strong for David; and then it is not pity, but policy to suspend the judgment. But our condition is described by the apostle, *that when we were sinners, and without strength, then Christ died for us*. Man is a despicable creature, so weak that he trembles at the appearance of a worm, and yet so wicked that he lifts up his head against heaven. How unable is he to encounter with offended Omnipotence! How easily can God destroy him, when, by his sole word, he made him! If he unclasps his hand that supports all things, they will presently relapse into their first confusion. The whole world of sinners was shut up, utterly unable to repel or avoid his displeasure. And what amazing love is it to spare rebels that were under his feet! *When a man finds his enemy, will he let him go well away?* But God, when we were all at his mercy, spared and saved us.

Besides, rebels sometimes solicit the favour of their prince by their acknowledgments, their tears and supplications, the testimonies of their repentance; but man persisted in his fierce enmity, and had the weapons of defiance in his hands against his Creator; he trampled on his laws and despised his deity, yet then the Lord of Hosts became the God of peace.

God, in creating the world, formed two natures capable of his image and favour, to glorify and enjoy him, angels, and men; and placed them in the principal parts of the universe, heaven and earth.

The angels were the eldest offspring of his love, the purest productions of that supreme light: man in his best state was inferior to them. A great number of them *kept not their first state* of integrity and felicity. Their sin is intimated in scripture: *Ordain not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil*; that is, lest he

become guilty of that sin which brought a severe sentence on the devil. The Prince of darkness was blinded with the lustre of his own excellences, and attempted upon the regalia of heaven, affecting an independent state. He disavowed his Benefactor, enriched with his benefits. And in the same moment he, with his companions in rebellion, were banished from heaven. *God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.* Mercy did not interpose to avert or suspend their judgment, but immediately they were expelled from the divine presence. Their judgment is irreversible; they are under the blackness of darkness for ever. There is not the least glimpse of hope to allay their sorrows, no star-light to sweeten the horrors of their eternal night. They are *servi pænæ*, that can never be redeemed. It were a kind of pardon to them to be capable of death; but God will never be so far reconciled, as to annihilate them. *His anger shall be accomplished, and his fury rest upon them.* Immortality, the privilege of their nature, infinitely increases their torment: for when the understanding, by a strong and active apprehension, hath a terrible and unbounded prospect of the continuance of their sufferings, that what is intolerable must be eternal, this inexpressibly exasperates their misery; there wants a word beyond death to set it forth. This is the condition of the sinning angels, and God might have dealt in as strict justice with rebellious man.

Although it was most consistent with the wisdom and justice of God, to conclude them under an irrevocable doom, yet the principal cause that inclined him to save man, was mere and perfect grace. The law made no distinction, but awarded the same punishment. Mercy alone made the difference; and the reason of that is in himself. Millions of them fell sacrifices to justice, and guilty

man was spared. It is not for the excellency of our natures, for man in his creation was lower than the angels; nor upon the account of service, for they having more eminent endowments of wisdom and power might have brought greater honour to God; nor for our innocence, for though not equally, yet we had highly offended him; but it must be resolved into *that love which passeth knowledge*. It was the unaccountable pleasure of God that *preferred babes before the wise and prudent*: and herein grace is most glorious. *He in no wise took the nature of angels*, though immortal Spirits. He did not put forth his hand to help them, and break the force of their fall, he did nothing for their relief, they are under unalloyed wrath: *but he took the seed of Abraham*, and plants a new colony of those who sprung from the earth, in the heavenly country, to fill up the vacant places of those apostate spirits. This is just matter of our highest admiration, why the milder attribute is exercised towards man, and the severer on them; why the vessels of clay are chosen, and the vessels of gold neglected. How can we reflect upon it without the warmest affections to our Redeemer? We shall never fully understand the riches of distinguishing grace, till our Saviour shall be their judge, and receive us into the kingdom of joy and glory, and condemn them to an eternal separation from his presence.

THE GREATNESS OF REDEEMING LOVE.

The next circumstance to be considered in the divine mercy is the degree of it. And this is described by the Apostle in all the dimensions which can signify its greatness. He prays for the Ephesians, *that they may be able to comprehend with all saints the*

breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of God in Christ which passeth knowledge. No language is sufficient to express it; if our hearts were as large as the sand on the sea-shore, yet they were too strait to comprehend it. But although we cannot arrive to the perfect knowledge of this excellent love, yet it is our duty to study it with the greatest application of mind; for our happiness depends upon it; and so far we may understand as to inflame our hearts with a superlative affection to God. And the full discovery which here we desire, and search after, in the future state shall be obtained by the presence and light of our Redeemer.

This complicated servitude of a sinner, the scripture represents under great variety of similitudes, that the defects of one may be supplied by another. Every sinner is a servant; now a servant by flight may recover his liberty, but the sinner is a captive in chains. A captive may be freed by laying down a ransom; but the sinner is deeply in debt. Every debtor is not miserable by his own fault, it may be his infelicity not his crime that he is poor; but the sinner is guilty of the highest offence. A guilty person may enjoy his health; but the sinner is sick of a deadly disease, an incurable wound. He that is sick and wounded may send for the physican in order to his recovery: but the sinner is in a deep sleep. He that is asleep may awake; but the sinner is in a state of death, which implies not only a cessation from all vital actions, but an absolute disability to perform them. The understanding is disabled for any spiritual perception, the will for any holy inclinations, the whole man is disabled for the sense of his wretched state. This is spiritual death which justly exposes the sinner to death temporal and eternal.

How great is that love which pitied and rescued us from sin and hell! This saving mercy is set out for its tenderness and vehemence, by the commotion

of the bowels, at the sight of one in misery : especially the working of the mother's when any evil befalls her children. Such an inward deep resentment of our distress was in the Father of mercies. *When we were in our blood, he said to us, live.* And that which further discovers the eminent degree of his love is this : he might have been unconcerned with our distress and left us under despair of deliverance. There is a compassion which ariseth from self-love, when the sight of another's misery surprises us, and affects us in such a manner as to disturb our repose, and embitter our joy, by considering our liableness to the same troubles, and from hence we are inclined to help them. And there is a compassion that proceeds from pure love to the miserable, when the person that expresses it, is above all the assaults of evil, and incapable of all affections that might lessen his felicity, and yet applies himself to relieve the afflicted ; and such was God's towards man.

If it had been a tolerable evil under which we were fallen, the mercy that recovered us had been less : for benefits are valued by the necessity of the receiver. But man was disinherited of paradise, an heir of hell, his misery was inconceivably great. Now the measure of God's love is proportionable to the misery from whence we are redeemed. If there had been any possible remedy for us in nature, our engagements had not been so great : but only he that created us by his power, could restore us by his love. Briefly, it magnifies the divine compassion, that our deliverance is full and entire. It had been admirable favour to have mitigated our misery ; but we have perfect redemption, sweetened by the remembrance of those dreadful evils that oppressed us. As the three Hebrew martyrs came unhurt out of the fiery furnace, *The hair of their heads was not singed, nor their coats changed, nor the smell of the fire had passed on them*, so the saints above have no marks of sin

or misery remaining upon them, not the *least spot or wrinkle* to blast their beauty, nor the least trouble to diminish their blessedness; but for ever possess the fulness of joy, and glory, a pure and triumphant felicity.

The greatness of the divine love towards fallen man, appears in the means by which our redemption is accomplished. And those are the incarnation and sufferings of the Son of God.

He was not made as Adam in the perfection of his nature, and beginning the first step of his life in the full exercise of reason, and dominion over the creatures, but he came into the world by the way of a natural birth, and dependence upon a mortal creature. The eternal wisdom of the Father stooped to a state of infancy, which is most distant from that of wisdom, wherein though the life is, yet the light of the reasonable soul is not visible; and the mighty God, to a condition of indigence and infirmity. The Lord of nature submitted to the laws of it. Admirable love, wherein God seemed to forget his own greatness, and the meanness of the creature.

The fulness of the Godhead dwelt in him bodily, yet in his humble state he was voluntarily deprived of those admirable effects which should proceed from that union. Strange separation between the Deity and the glory that results from it! God is light, and the Son is the brightness of his Father's glory, yet in his pilgrimage upon the earth he was always under a cloud. Astonishing miracle! transcending all those in the compass of nature, yet the power of love effected it. He was made not only *lower than the angels*, but *less than all men*, joining (oh amazing abasement!) the majesty of God, with the meanness of a worm. The high and lofty One, whom the prophets saw *exalted on a high throne*, and all the powers of heaven in a posture of reverence about him, *was despised and rejected of men; they turned their eyes*

from him, not for the lustre of his countenance, but for shame.

Where can be found an example of such love? Some have favourable inclinations to help the distressed, and will express so much compassion as is consistent with their state and quality: but if in order to the relieving of the miserable, one must submit to what is shameful, who hath an affection so strong and vehement as to purchase his brother's redemption at the loss of his own honour? Yet the Son of God descended from his throne, and put on our vile mortality: he parted with his glory, that he might be qualified to part with his life for our salvation. How doth this exalt his compassion to us!

Add further, He took our nature after it had lost its primitive innocency. The natural distance between God and the creature is infinite; the moral between God and the sinful creature, if possible, is more than infinite: yet the mercy of our Redeemer overcame this distance. What an extacy of love transported the Son of God so far as to espouse our nature, after it was depraved and dishonoured with sin? He was essential innocence and purity, yet *he came in the similitude of sinful flesh*, which to outward view was not different from what was really sinful. He was the holy Lawgiver, yet he submitted to that law, which made him appear under the character and disreputation of a sinner. He paid the bloody tribute of the children of wrath, being circumcised as guilty of Adam's sin; and he was baptised as guilty of his own.

The most evident and sensible proof of the greatness of God's love to mankind, is in the sufferings of our Redeemer to obtain our pardon.

The Lord Jesus Christ alone had perfect light to discover sin in its true horror, and perfect zeal to hate it according to its nature: for who can under-

stand the excellency of good, and the malignity of evil, but the Author of the one and the Judge of the other? Who can fully conceive the guilt of rebellion against God but the Son of God who is alone able to comprehend his own majesty? On this account the grief of our Redeemer exceeded all the sorrows of repenting sinners, from the beginning of the world. For our knowledge is so imperfect, and our zeal so remiss, that our grief for sin is much beneath what it is worthy of: but sin was as hateful to Christ as it is in itself, and his sorrow was equal to its evil.

He was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. And who is able to conceive the weight of God's hand, when he punishes sin according to its desert? Who can understand the degrees of those sufferings when God exacts satisfaction from one that was obliged, and able to make it? How piercing were those sorrows whereby divine justice, infinitely incensed, was to be appeased? Who knows the consequence of those words, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* It is impossible to comprehend, or represent that great and terrible mystery.

All comforting influences were suspended, but without prejudice to the personal union, or the perfection of his grace, or to the love of his Father toward him. His soul was liable to sorrows, as his body to death.

The sorrows of his forsaken state were inexpressibly great; for according to the degree and sense we have of happiness, such in proportion is our grief for the loss of it. Now Christ had the fullest enjoyment, and the highest valuation of God's favour. His enjoyment was raised above what the most glorious Spirits are capable of: all his faculties were pure and vigorous, never blunted with sin, and intimately united to the Deity. How cutting then was it to his soul, to be suspended from the perfect vision of God?

To be divorced as it were from himself, and to lose that paradise he always had within him ! If all the angels of light were at once deprived of their glory, the loss were not equal to this dreadful eclipse of the sun of righteousness : as if all the stars were extinguished, the darkness would not be so terrible, as if the sun, the fountain of light, were put out. Whatever his sufferings were in kind, yet in degree they were answerable to the full and just desert of sin, and surpassed the power of the human or angelical nature to endure. In short, his sorrows were only equalled by that love which procured them.

The Son of God endured no gentler nor nobler death than that of the cross. His pure and gracious hands, which were never stretched out but to do good, were pierced ; and those feet which bore the Redeemer of the world, and for which the waters had a reverence, were nailed. His body, the precious workmanship of the Holy Ghost, the temple of the deity, was destroyed. He that is the glory of heaven was made the scorn of the earth : the King of Kings was crucified between two thieves, in Jerusalem, at their sacred feast, in the face of the world. His naked body was exposed on the cross for three hours, only covered with a veil of darkness. There was such a stupendous submission of the Son of God that his death astonished the universe in another manner, than his birth and life, his resurrection and ascension. Universal nature relented at his last sufferings. The sun was struck with horror and withdrew its light ; it did not appear crowned with beams, when the Creator was with thorns. The earth trembled, and the rocks rent, the most insensible creature sympathised with him, and it is in this we have the most visible instance of divine love to us.

St. John represents to us that *God is love*, not charitable and loving, that is too weak an expression, but love itself. The divine nature is infinite essential

love ; in which other perfections are included. And he produces the strongest and most convincing testimony of it: *In this was manifested the love of God to us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.* The love of God in all temporal blessings is but faint in the comparison with the love that is exprest in our Redeemer. As much as the Creator exceeds the creature, the gift of Christ is above the gift of the whole world. *Herein is love*, saith the apostle, that is, the clearest and highest expression of it that can be, *God sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins.* The giving of heaven itself with all its joys and glory, is not so perfect and full a demonstration of the love of God, as the giving of his Son to die for us.

It is an endearing circumstance of this love, that it warmed the heart of God from eternity, and was never interrupted in that vast duration. Great benefits that come from a sudden flush of affection, are not so highly estimable, as when dispensed with judgment and counsel: because they do not argue in the giver such a true valuation, and fixed love of the person that receives them. The spring-tide may be followed by as low an ebb ; the benefactor may repent of his favours as spent in vain : but our salvation by Christ is the product of God's eternal thoughts, the fruit of love that ever remains. *He was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*, to suffer for us. Before the world began, we were before the eyes, nay in the heart of God. And yet the continuance of this love through infinite ages past, is less than the degree of it.

When no meaner ransom than the blood royal of heaven could purchase our redemption, God delighted in the expense of that sacred treasure for us. *It pleased the Lord to bruise him.* Though the death of Christ, absolutely considered, was the highest provocation of God's displeasure, and brought the

greatest guilt upon the Jews, for which *wrath came upon them to the uttermost* ; yet in respect of the end, namely the salvation of men, it was the most grateful offering to him, *a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour*. God repented that he made man, but never that he redeemed him.

The love of our Saviour was so pure and great, there can be no resemblance, much less any parallel of it. For he was perfectly holy, and so the privilege of immortality was due to him, and his life was infinitely more precious than the lives of angels and men, yet he laid it down and submitted to a cursed death, and to that which was infinitely more bitter, the wrath of God. And all this for sinful men, who were under the just and heavy displeasure of the Almighty. *He loved us, and gave himself for us* ; if he had only interposed as an advocate to speak for us, or only had acted for our recovery, his love had been admirable ; but he suffered for us. He is not only our Mediator, but Redeemer ; not only Redeemer, but Ransom.

It was not any defect of power, but the strength of his love that made him to suffer. He was willing to be crucified, that we might be glorified : our redemption was sweeter to him than death was bitter, by which it was to be obtained. It was excellently said by Pherecydes, that God transformed himself into love when he made the world : but with greater reason it is said by the apostle, *God is love*, when he redeemed it. It was love that, by a miraculous condescension, took our nature, accomplishing the desire of the mystical spouse, *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth* : it was love that stooped to the form of a servant, and led a poor despised life here below : it was love that endured a death neither easy nor honourable, but most unworthy of the glory of the divine, and the innocence of the human nature. Love chose to die on the cross, that we might live in heaven,

rather than to enjoy that blessedness, and leave mankind in misery.

THE GREATNESS OF DIVINE LOVE IN THE END OF
REDEMPTION.

The third consideration which makes the love of God so admirable to lapsed man, is the excellency of that state to which he is advanced by the Redeemer. To be only exempted from death is a great favour: the grace of a prince is eminent in releasing a condemned person from the punishment of the law. This is sufficient for the mercy of man, but not for the love of God: he pardons and prefers the guilty; he rescues us from hell, and raises us to glory; he bestows eternity upon those who were unworthy of life.

The grace of the gospel hath so much mended our condition, that if it were offered to our choice, either to enjoy the innocent state of Adam, or the renewed by Christ, it were folly like that of our first parents, to prefer the former before the latter. The jubilee of the law restored to the same inheritance, but the jubilee of the gospel gives us the investiture of that which is transcendentally better than what we at first possessed. Since *the day-spring from on high hath visited us in tender mercy*, we are enriched with higher prerogatives, and are under a better covenant, and entitled to a more glorious reward, than was due to man by the law of his creation.

Adam was the son of God by creation, but to be joined to Christ as our head, by a union so intimate, that *he lives in us*, and counts himself incomplete without us, and by that union to be adopted into the line of heaven, and thereby to have an interest in the *exceeding great and precious promises* of the gospel; to be *constituted heirs of God, and co-heirs with Christ*, are

such discoveries of the dignity of our supernatural state, that the lowest believer is advanced above Adam in all his honour.

Angels and men are as two different nations in language and customs, but under the same empire ; and if a prince that commands two nations should employ one for the safety and prosperity of the other, it were an argument of special favour. Now the angels are *sent forth to minister for them who are heirs of salvation.*

Restoring mercy hath bettered our condition : we have lost the integrity of the first, and got the perfection of the second Adam : our salvation is put into a stronger and safer hand. *I give, saith our Redeemer, unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.* That is an inviolable sanctuary, from whence no believer can be taken. Christ is our friend, not only to the altar, but now in the throne : our reconciliation is *ascribed to his death*, our conservation *to his life*. He that was created in a state of nature could sin and die, but *he that is born of God cannot sin unto death* : the new birth is unto eternal life. In short, as the mercy of God is glorified in the whole work of our salvation, so specially in the first and last grace it confers upon us. In vocation that prevents us, and perseverance that crowns us : according to the double change made in our state, translating us from darkness to light, and from the imperfect light of grace to the full light of glory.

Adam in his natural state was not capable of the vision of God. Heaven is too pure an air for him to have lived in. The glory of it is inconsistent with such a tempered body. *Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven.* The faculties would be confounded with its overcoming brightness. Till the sensitive powers are refined, and exalted to that degree that they become spiritual, they cannot converse

with glorified objects. Now the bodies of the saints shall be invested with celestial qualities. The natural shall be changed into a spiritual body, and be preserved, as the angels, by the sole virtue of the quickening spirit. The life above shall flourish in its full vigour, without any other support than the divine power that first created it. And as the body shall be spiritual, so truly immortal, and free from all corruptive change. And the glorified body shall be clothed with a more divine beauty in the resurrection, than Adam had in the creation. The glory of the second temple shall excel that of the first. In short, the first *man was of the earth earthy*, and could derive but an earthy condition to his descendants: but the Lord Christ is from heaven, and is the principle of an heavenly and glorious life to all that are united to him.

Adam had a visible copy of his invisible beauty, but the saints in heaven see the glorious original. He saw God in the reflection of the creature, but the saints are under the direct beams of glory, and *see him face to face*. All the attributes appear in their full and brightest lustre to them. Wisdom, love, holiness, power, are manifested in their exaltation. And the glorified soul, to qualify it for converse with God in this intimate manner, hath a more excellent constitution than was given to it in the creation. A new edge is put upon the faculties whereby they are fitted for those objects which are peculiar to heaven. The intellectual eye is fortified for the immediate intuition of God. Adam in paradise was absent from the Lord, in comparison of the saints who encompass his throne, and are in the presence of his glory.

Adam was liable to temptations, and capable of change, he fell in the garden of Eden, and was sentenced to die. But heaven is the sanctuary of life and immortality; it is inaccessible to any evil. The

serpent that corrupted paradise with its poison not enter there. As there is no seed of corn within, so no cause of it without. Our Redeemer offered himself by the Eternal Spirit, and purchased an eternal inheritance for his people. Their inheritance is full and perpetual, without increase, for in that moment it is perfect, and shall continue without declination. The day of judgment is called that day, for days, and weeks, and months, and years revolutions which now measure time, shall be swallowed up in an unchangeable eternity. *They shall be for ever with the Lord.* And in all respects, the glory of the redeemed, as far as exceeds the felicity of man in the creation, as heaven, the seat of it, is above the fading beauty of the terrestrial paradise.

PRACTICAL INFERENCES FROM A SENSE OF DEPENDENCE
ON LOVE.

What astonishing goodness is it, that God, the author and end of all things, should become the means of our salvation? and by the lowest instrument? What is so worthy of admiration as that the eternal should become mortal, that being in the image of God, he should take on him the form of a servant, that the judge of the world should be condemned as guilty, that he should leave his throne in heaven, be nailed to the cross, that the prince of life should taste of death? These are the great wonders that the Lord of love hath performed, and all for the sake of a miserable, and unworthy man, who deserved not the least drop of that sweat and blood he spent for him, and without any advantage to himself, for what can be added to his felicity by a cursed creature? Infinite love, that is as admirable as the

Love that passeth knowledge! and is as much above our comprehension as desert.

God, to overcome our fears, and to melt us into a compliance, hath given in the scripture the highest assurance of his willingness to receive all relenting and returning sinners. He interposes the most solemn oath, to remove our suspicions. *As I live, saith the Lord, I delight not in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. And have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God. And not that he should return from his ways and live?* The majesty and ardency of the expressions testify the truth and vehemency of his desire, so far as the excellency of his nature is capable to feel our affections. And the reason of it is clear; for the conversion of a sinner implies a thorough change in the will and affections from sin to grace, and that is infinitely pleasing to God's holiness, and the giving of life to the converted is most suitable to his mercy. The angels who are infinitely inferior to him in goodness, rejoice in the repentance and salvation of men, much more doth God. There is an eminent difference between his inclinations to exercise mercy and justice. He uses expressions of regret when he is constrained to punish. *O that my people had hearkened to me, and Israel had walked in my ways. And how shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? mine heart is turned within me,* as a merciful judge, that pities the man when he condemns the malefactor. But he dispenses acts of grace with pleasure, *he pardons iniquity, and passes by transgressions, because he delights in mercy.* It is true, when sinners are finally obdurate, God is pleased in their ruin, for the honour of his justice; yet it is not in such a manner as in their conversion and life. He doth not invite sinners to transgress, that he may condemn them: he is not pleased when they give occasion for the exercise of his anger. And above

all, we have the clearest and surest discovery of pardoning mercy in the death of Christ. For what stronger evidence can there be of God's readiness to pardon, than sending his Son into the world to be a sacrifice for sin, that mercy without prejudice to his other perfections might upon our repentance forgive us? And what more rational argument is there, and more congruous to the breast of a man, to work in him a serious grief, and hearty detestation of sin, not only as a cursed thing, but as it is contrary to the divine will, than the belief that God, in whose power alone it is to pardon sinners, is most desirous to pardon them, if they will return to obedience? The prodigal in his extreme distress resolved to go to his father with penitential acknowledgments and submission: and, to use the words of a devout writer, his guilty conscience as desperate asked him, *qua spe*, with what hope! he replied to himself, *Illam qua pater est. Ego perdidici quod erat filii; ille quod patris est non amisit*. Though I have neglected the duty and lost the confidence of a son, he hath not lost the compassion of a father. That parable represents man in his degenerate forlorn state, and that the divine goodness is the motive that prevails upon him to return to his duty.

Wilful neglect of redeeming mercy aggravates the sentence, and brings an extraordinary damnation upon sinners. Besides the doom of the law which continues in its vigour against transgressors, the gospel adds a more heavy one against the impenitent, *because he believes not in the name of the only begotten Son of God*. Infidelity is an outrage not to a man or an angel, but to the eternal Son. For the redemption of souls is reckoned as a part of his reward, *he shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied*. Those therefore who spurn at salvation, deny him the honour of his sufferings: and are guilty of the defiance of his love, of the contempt of his clemency, of

the provocation of the most sensible and severe attribute when it is incensed. This increases the anguish of his sufferings, and embitters the cup of his passion. This renews his sorrows, and makes his wounds bleed afresh. Dreadful impiety ! that exceeds the guilt of the Jews ; they once killed him being in his humble inglorious state, but this is a daily crucifying him now glorified. Ungrateful wretches ! that refuse to bring glory to their Redeemer, and blessedness to themselves. That rather choose that the accuser should triumph in their misery, than their Saviour rejoice in their felicity. *This is the great condemnation, that Christ came into the world to save men from death, and they refuse the pardon.* It is an aggravation of sin above what the devils are capable of ; for pardon was never offered to those rebellious spirits. In short, so deadly a malignity there is in it, that it poisons the gospel itself, and turns the sweetest mercy into the sorest judgment. The sun of righteousness, who is a reviving light to the penitent believer, is a consuming fire to the obdurate. How much more tolerable had been the condition of such sinners, if saving grace had never appeared unto men, or they had never heard of it ! for the degrees of wrath shall be in proportion to the riches of neglected goodness. The refusing life from Christ, makes us guilty of his death. And when he shall come in his glory, and be visible to all that pierced him, what vengeance will be the portion of those who despised the majesty of his person, the mystery of his compassions and sufferings ! Those that lived and died in the darkness of heathenism, shall have a cooler climate in hell, than those who neglect the great salvation.

JUSTICE AND MERCY CONCUR IN REDEMPTION.

The two great attributes which are exercised towards reasonable creatures in their lapsed state, are mercy and justice : these admirably concur in the work of our redemption. Although God spared guilty man for the honour of his mercy, yet he *spared not his own Son*, who became a surety for the offender, but delivered him up to a cruel death, for the glory of his justice.

To declare God's hatred of sin, which is essential to his nature, to preserve the honour of the law which otherwise would be securely despised, and lose its effect, to prevent sin by keeping up in men an holy fear to offend God, an eternal respect in the rational creature to him, it was most fit that the presumptuous breach of God's command should not be unpunished. Now when the Son of God was made a sacrifice for sin, and by a bloody death made expiation of it, the world is convinced how infinitely hateful sin is to him, the dignity of the law is maintained, and sin is most effectually discouraged. There is the same terror, though not the same rigour, as if all mankind had been finally condemned. Thus it appears how becoming God it was, to accomplish our salvation in such a manner, that justice and mercy are revealed in their most noble and eminent effects and operations.

For justice requires a proportion between the punishment and the crime ; and that receives its quality from the dignity of the person offended. Now since the majesty of God is infinite against whom sin is committed, the guilt of it can never be expiated but by an infinite satisfaction. There is no *name under heaven, nor in heaven* that could save us, but the Son of God, who being equal to him in greatness, became man.

The apostle tells us that it *pleased the Father that in him all fulness should dwell*. This respects not his original nature, but his office, and the reason of it is, *to reconcile by the blood of the cross, things in heaven and in the earth*. From the greatness of the work we may infer the quality of the means, and from the quality of the means, the nature of the person that is to perform it. Peace with God who was provoked by our rebellion, could only be made by an infinite sacrifice. Now in Christ the Deity itself, not its influences, and the fulness of it, not any particular perfection only, dwelt really and substantially. God was present in the ark in a shadow and representation; he is present in nature by his sustaining power, and in his saints by special favour, and the eminent effects, the graces and comforts that proceed from it; but he is present in Christ in a singular and transcendent manner. The humanity is related to the Word not only as a creature to the author of its being, for in this regard it hath an equal respect to all the persons, but by a peculiar conjunction; for it is actuated by the same subsistence as the divine essence is in the Son, but with this difference, the one is voluntary, the other necessary; the one is espoused by love, the other received by nature.

One hour of Christ's life glorified God more, than an everlasting duration spent by angels and men in the praises of him. For the most perfect creatures are limited, and finite, and their services cannot fully correspond with the majesty of God; but when the Word was made flesh, and entered into a new state of subjection, he glorified God in a divine manner, and most worthy of him. He that *comes from above, is above all*. The all-sufficiency of his satisfaction arises from hence, *He that was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God*; that is, in the truth of the divine nature was equal with the Father, and without sacrilege, or

usurpation, possessed divine honour, he became obedient to the death of the cross. *The Lord of Glory was crucified. We are purchased by the blood of God. And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.* The divine nature gives it an infinite and everlasting efficacy.

The design of God was to declare his righteousness, that is, that glorious attribute that inclines him to punish sinners; for in the legal propitiations, although the guilt of men was publicly declared in the death of the sacrifices, yet the justice of God did not fully appear, since he accepted the life of a beast in compensation for the life of a man; but in the death of Christ he hath given the most clear demonstration of his justice, a sufficient example of his hatred to sin, condemning and punishing it in the person of his beloved Son; that the whole world may acknowledge it was not from any inadvertency, but merely by the dispensation of his wisdom and goodness that he forbore so long. And by the death of Christ he hath declared that glorious mystery which no created understanding could ever have conceived, that he is inflexibly just, and will not suffer sin to pass unpunished; and that he justifies those who are guilty in themselves, if by a purifying faith they receive Christ for pardon.

Our exemption from punishment, and our restoration to communion with God in grace and glory, is the fruit of his expiating sin. For this reason the blood of the Mediator *speaks better things than that of Abel.* For that cried for revenge against the murderer, but his procures remission to believers. And as the just desert of sin is separation from the presence of God, who is the fountain of felicity, so when the guilt is taken away, the person is received into God's favour and fellowship. A representation of this is set down in Exodus xxiv. where we have described the manner of dedicating the covenant

between God and Israel by bloody sacrifices : after Moses had finished the offering, and sprinkled the blood on the altar and the people, the elders of Israel, who were forbid before to approach near to the Lord, were then invited to come into his presence, and in token of reconciliation feasted before him. Thus the eternal covenant is established by the blood of the Mediator, and all the benefits it contains, as remission of sins, freedom to draw near to the throne of grace, and the enjoyment of God in glory, are the fruits of his reconciling sacrifice.

As the freeness, so the riches of his mercy is not lessened by the satisfaction Christ made for us. It is true we have a pattern of God's justice, never to be paralleled, in the death of Christ ; but to the severity of justice towards his only beloved Son, his clemency towards us guilty rebels is fully commensurate. For he pardons us without the expence of one drop of our blood, though the soul of Christ was poured forth as an offering for sin. Nay, hereby the divine clemency is more commended, than by an absolute forgiveness of sin without respect to satisfaction. For the honour of God being concerned in the punishment of sin, that man might not continue under a sad obligation to it, he was pleased by the astonishing wonder of his Son's death to vindicate his glory, that repenting believers may be justified before him. Thus in an admirable manner he satisfies justice, and exalts mercy : and this could have been no other way effected : for if he had by mere sovereignty dissolved our guilt, and by his Spirit renewed his image in us, his love had eminently appeared, but his justice had not been glorified. But in our redemption they are both infinitely magnified ; his love could give no more than the life of his Son, and justice required no less ; for death *being the wages of sin*, there could be no satisfaction without the death of our Redeemer.

The receiving believers into heaven is a convincing proof of the all-sufficiency of his sacrifice. For justice will not permit that glory and immortality, which are the privileges of the righteous, should be given to guilty and defiled creatures. Therefore our Saviour's first and greatest work was to remove the bar that excluded us from the place of felicity. It is more difficult to justify a sinner than to glorify a saint. The goodness of God inclines him to bestow happiness on those who are not obnoxious to the law; but his justice was to be atoned by sufferings. Now what stronger argument can there be, that God is infinitely pleased with what his Son hath done and suffered for his people, than the taking of them into his presence to see his glory? The apostle sets down this order in the work of our redemption, *that Christ being made perfect by sufferings*, that is, having consummated that part of his office which respected the expiation of sin, *became the Author of eternal salvation to all that obey him.*

Christ hath satisfied justice, that God may exercise pardoning mercy in such a manner as is suitable to his other perfections. Now it is contrary to his wisdom to dispense the precious benefits of his Son's blood to impenitent unbelievers; to give such rich pearls, and so dearly bought, to swine that will trample them under their feet; to bestow salvation on those who despise the Saviour. It is contrary to his holiness to forgive those who will securely abuse his favour, as if his pardon were a privilege and license to sin against him. Nay, final impenitency is unpardonable to mercy itself. For the objects of justice and mercy cannot be the same: now an impenitent sinner is necessarily under the revenging justice of God. It is no disparagement to his omnipotency that he cannot save such: for although God can do whatsoever he will, yet he can will nothing but what is agreeable to his nature. Not that there

is any law above God that obliges him to act, but he is a law to himself. And the more excellent his perfections are, the less he can contradict them. As it is no reflection upon his power that he cannot die, neither is it that he can do nothing unbecoming his perfections. On the contrary, it implies weakness to be liable to any such act. Thus supposing the creature holy, it is impossible but he should love it; not that he owes any thing to the creature, but in regard he is infinitely good: and if impenitent and obstinate in sin, he cannot but hate and punish it; not that he is accountable for his actions, but because he is infinitely just.

PRACTICAL INFERENCES FROM THE DEATH AND
MEDIATION OF CHRIST.

From hence we may discover most clearly the evil of sin, which no sacrifice could expiate but the blood of the Son of God. It is true, the internal malignity of sin, abstracted from its dreadful effects, is most worthy of our hatred: for it is in its own nature direct enmity against God, and obscures the glory of all his attributes. It is the violation of his majesty, who is the universal sovereign of heaven and earth. A contrariety to his holiness, which shines forth in his law. A despising his goodness, the attractive to obedience. The contempt of his omniscience, which sees every sin when it is committed. The slighting of his terrible justice and power, as if the sinner could secure himself from his indignation. A denial of his truth, as if the threatening were a vain terror to scare men from sin. And all this done voluntarily, to please an irregular corrupt appetite, by a despicable creature, who absolutely depends upon God for his being and happiness.

If justice itself had rent the heavens, and come

down in the most visible terror to revenge the rebellions of men, it could never have made stronger impressions upon us than the death of Christ duly considered. By how much the life of Christ was more precious than the lives of all men, so much in his death doth the wrath of God appear more fully against sin, than it would in the destruction of the whole world of sinners.

If the curtain were drawn aside, and we should look into the chambers of death, where sinners *lie down in sorrow* for ever, and hear the woful expressions and deep complaints of the damned, with what horror and distraction they speak of their torments, we could not have a fuller testimony of God's infinite displeasure against sin than in the anguish and agonies of our Redeemer. For whatever his sufferings were in kind, yet in their degree and measure they were equally terrible with those that condemned sinners endure. Now how is it possible that rational agents should freely, in the open light, for perishing vanities, dare to commit sin? Can they avoid or endure the wrath of an incensed God? If God spared not his Son, when he came in the similitude of sinful flesh, how shall sinners who are deeply and universally defiled escape? Can they fortify themselves against the Supreme Judge? Can they encounter with the fury of the Almighty, the apprehensions of which made the *soul of Christ heavy unto death*? Have they patience to bear that for ever, which was to Christ, who had the strength of the Deity to support him, intolerable for a few hours? If it were so with the green tree, what will become of the dry when exposed to the fiery trial? If he that was holy and innocent suffered so dreadfully, what must they expect who add impenitency to their guilt, and live in the bold commission of sin, without reflection and remorse? What prodigious madness is it *to drink iniquity like water*, as a harmless thing, when it is a

poison so deadly, that the least drop of it brings certain ruin! What desperate folly, to have slight apprehensions of that which is attended with the first and second death! Nothing but unreasonable infidelity and inconsideration can make men venturous to provoke the living God, who is infinitely sensible of their sins, and who both can and will most terribly punish them for ever.

And the economy of our salvation clearly proves, that, to preserve the honour of God's government, it was most fit sin should be punished, that sinners might be pardoned. For nothing was more repugnant to the will of God absolutely considered, than the death of his beloved Son; and the natural will of Christ was averse from it. What then moved that infinite wisdom, which wills nothing but what is perfectly reasonable, to ordain that event? Why should it take so great a circuit, if the way was so short, that by pure favour, without satisfaction, sin might have been pardoned? Our Saviour declares the necessity of his suffering death, supposing the merciful will of his Father to save us, when he saith, that *as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish*. The apostle supposes this necessity of satisfaction as an evident principle, when he proves wilful apostates to be incapable of salvation, *because there remains no more sacrifice for sin*: for the consequence were of no force, if sin might be pardoned without sacrifice, that is, without satisfaction.

To those who look on the death of Christ with the eyes of carnal wisdom, and according to the laws of corrupt reason, it appears folly and weakness, and most unworthy of God: but if we consider it in its principles and ends, all the prejudices vanish, and we clearly discover it to be the most noble and eminent effect of the wisdom, power, goodness and justice of God.

The doctrine of the cross is the only foundation of the gospel, that unites all its parts, and supports the whole building. It is the cause of our righteousness and peace, of our redemption and reconciliation. How blessed an exchange have the merits of his sufferings made with those of our sins! Life instead of death, glory for shame, and happiness for misery. For this reason the apostle with vehemence declares that to be the sole ground of his boasting and triumph, which others esteemed a cause of blushing: *God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of Christ.* He rejects with extreme detestation the mention of any other thing, as the cause of his happiness, and matter of his glory. The cross was a tree of death to Christ, and of life to us. The supreme wisdom is justified of its children.

The satisfaction of divine justice by the sufferings of Christ, affords the strongest assurance to man, who is a guilty and suspicious creature, that God is most ready to pardon sin. There is in the natural conscience when opened by a piercing conviction of sin, such a quick sense of guilt and God's justice, that it can never have an entire confidence in his mercy till justice be atoned. From hence the convinced sinner is restlessly inquisitive, how to find out the way of reconciliation with a righteous God. Thus he is represented inquiring by the prophet, *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the most High God? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*

The apostle reckons among the privileges of believers, that they are come to God the judge of all, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaks better things than the blood of Abel. The apprehension of God as the judge

of the world, strikes the guilty with fear and terror ; but as he is sweetened by the Mediator, we may approach to him with confidence. For what sins are there which so entire a satisfaction doth not expiate ? What torments can they deserve, which his wounds and stripes have not removed ? God is just as well as merciful in justifying those who believe in Jesus. It is not the quality of sins, but of sinners, that excepts them from pardon. Christ is the golden altar in Heaven for penitent believers to fly to, from whence God will never pluck any one to destroy him.

That righteousness which was acquired by the obedience and meritorious sufferings of Christ, and is embraced by faith, is all-sufficient for our justification. This is as pure as innocence, to all the effects of pardon and reconciliation ; this alone secures us from the charge of the law and the challenge of justice. Being clothed with this, we may enter heaven, and converse with the pure society of angels without blushing. The saints who now reign in glory, were not men who lived in the perfection of holiness here below ; but repenting believing sinners, who were washed white in the blood of the Lamb.

THE HOLINESS OF GOD GLORIFIED IN REDEMPTION.

Of all the perfections of the Deity, none is more worthy of his nature, and so peculiarly admirable, as his infinite purity. It is the most shining attribute that derives a lustre to all the rest : *he is glorious in holiness*. Wisdom degenerates into craft, power into tyranny, mercy loses its nature without holiness. He swears by it as his supreme excellency : *once have I sworn by my holiness, I will not lie unto David*. It is the most venerable attribute, in the praise whereof the harmony of heaven agrees. The angels and saints above are represented expressing their

ecstasy and ravishment at the beauty of holiness. *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory.* This he only loves and values in the creature, being the impression of his most divine and amiable perfection. Inferior creatures have a resemblance of other divine attributes; the winds and thunder set forth God's power, the firmness of the rocks, and the incorruptibility of the heavens are an obscure representation of his unchangeableness; but holiness, that is the most orient-pearl in the crown of heaven, only shines in the reasonable creature. Upon this account man only is said to be formed after his image. And in men there are some appearances of the Deity, that do not entitle to his special love. In princes there is a shadow of his sovereignty, yet they may be the objects of his displeasure; but a likeness to God in holiness attracts his eye and heart, and infinitely endears the creature to him. Now this attribute is in a special manner provoked by man's sin, and we are restored to the favour and friendship of God, in such a manner as may preserve the honour of it entire and inviolable.

THE HOLINESS OF GOSPEL PRECEPTS.

Humility is the peculiar grace of Christians, so becoming our state as creatures and sinners; the parent and nurse of other graces; that preserves in us the light of faith, and the heat of love; that procures modesty in prosperity, and patience in adversity; that is the root of gratitude and obedience, and is so lovely in God's eyes, that *he gives grace to the humble.* This our Saviour makes a necessary qualification in all those who shall enter into his kingdom: *Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.* As by humility he purchased our salva-

tion, so by that grace we possess it. The gospel ascribes all that is good in man to the free and powerful grace of God: *He works in us to will and to do of his good pleasure.* He gives grace to some because he is good, denies it to others because he is just; but doth injury to none, because all being guilty, he owes it to none. Grace in its being and activity entirely depends upon him. As the drowsy sap is drawn forth into flourishing and fruitfulness by the approaches of the sun; so habitual grace is drawn forth into act by the presence and influences of the Sun of Righteousness. *Without me, our Saviour tells his disciples, ye can do nothing. I have laboured more abundantly than they all, saith the apostle, yet not I, but the grace of God in me.* The operations of grace are ours, but the power that enables us is from God. Our preservation from evil, and perseverance in good, is a most free unmerited favour, the effect of his renewed grace in the course of our lives. Without his special assistance, we should every hour forsake him, and provoke him to forsake us. As the iron cannot ascend or hang in the air longer than the virtue of the loadstone draws it; so our affections cannot ascend to those glorious things that are above, without the continually-attracting power of grace.

The gospel strictly commands self-denial, when the honour of God and religion is concerned. Jesus tells his disciples, *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.* Life and all the comforts of it, estates, honours, relations, pleasures must be put under our feet, to take the first step with our Redeemer. This is absolutely necessary to the being of a Christian. In the preparation of his mind and the resolution of his will, he must live a martyr; and whensoever his duty requires, he must break all the *retinacula vitæ*, the voluntary bands that fasten us to the world, and die

a martyr, rather than suffer a divorce to be made between his heart and Christ. Whatsoever is most esteemed and loved in the world, must be parted with as a snare, if it tempts us from our obedience; or offered up as a sacrifice, when the glory of God calls for it. And this command that appears so hard to sense, is most just and reasonable. For God hath by so many titles a right to us, that we ought to make an entire dedication of ourselves and our most valuable interests to him. Our Redeemer infinitely denied himself to save us, and it is most just we should in gratitude deny ourselves, to serve him.

The gospel enjoins contentment in every state, which is our great duty and felicity, mainly influential upon our whole life to prevent both sin and misery. *Be content with such things as you have, for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.* It forbids all murmurings against providence, which is the seed of rebellion, and all anxious thoughts concerning things future: *Take no thought for the morrow.* We should not anticipate evils by our apprehensions and fears, they come fast enough; nor retain their afflicting memory to embitter our lives, they stay long enough: *Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.* Our corrupt desires are vast and restless as the sea, and when contradicted they betray us to discontent and disobedience. The gospel therefore retrenches all inordinate affections, and vehemently condemns covetousness, as a vice not to be named among saints but with abhorrency. It discovers to us most clearly, that temporal things are not the materials of our happiness. For the Son of God voluntarily denied himself the enjoyment of them. And as the highest stars are so much distant from an eclipse, as they are above the shadow of the earth, so the soul that in its esteem and desires is above the world, its brightness and joy cannot be darkened or eclipsed by any accidents there. The

gospel forbids all vain sorrows, as well as vain pleasures; and distinguishes real godliness from an appearance, by contentment as its inseparable character. *Godliness with content is great gain.* When we are in the saddest circumstances, our Saviour commands us *to possess our souls in patience*, to preserve a calm constitution of spirit, which no storms from without can discompose. For this end he assures us that nothing comes to pass without the knowledge and efficiency, or at least, permission of God. *That the hairs of our head are numbered, and not one falls to the earth without his licence.* Now the serious belief of a wise, just, and powerful providence that governs all things, hath a mighty efficacy to maintain a constant tranquillity, and equal temper in the soul amidst the confusions of the world. *God works all things according to the counsel of his own will*; and if we could discover the immediate reasons of every providence, we cannot have more satisfaction than from this general principle, that is applicable to all as light to every colour, that what God doth is always best. This resolves all the doubts of the most entangled minds, and rectifies our false judgments. From hence a believer hath as true content in complying with God's will, as if God had complied with his, and is reconciled to every condition. Besides, the gospel assures us, that *all things work together for the good of those that love God.* For their spiritual good at present, by weakening their corruptions; for affliction is a kind of manage, by which the sensual part is exercised and made pliable to the motions of the Spirit, and by increasing their graces, the invaluable treasures of heaven. If the dearest objects of our affections, the most worthy of our love and grief, are taken away, it is for this reason, that God may have our love himself in its most intense and inflamed degree. And afflictions are in order to their everlasting good. Now the certain expectation of a blessed issue out of all troubles,

is to the heart of a Christian as the putting a rudder to a ship, which without it is exposed to the fury of the winds, and in continual dangers, but by its guidance makes use of every wind to convey it to its port. Hope produces not only acquiescence, but joy in the sharpest tribulations. For every true Christian being ordained to a glorious and supernatural blessedness hereafter; all things that befall them here below as means, are regulated and transformed into the nature of the end to which they carry them. Accordingly the apostle assures us, that *Our light afflictions which are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* To consider this life as the passage to another that is as durable as eternity, and as blessed as the enjoyment of God can make it; that the present miseries have a final respect to future happiness, will change our opinion about them, and render them not only tolerable, but so far amiable as they are instrumental and preparatory for it. If the bloody as well as the milky way leads to God's throne, a Christian willingly walks in it. In short, a lively hope accompanies a Christian to his last expiring breath, till it is consummated in celestial fruition. So that death itself, the universal terror of mankind, is made desirable, as an entrance into immortality, and the first day of our triumph.

Our Saviour, to encourage our hopes, offers to us a reward infinitely valuable: for as God is infinite, such is the happiness he bestows on his favourites. It is described to us in scripture by the most enamouring representations, as a state of peace and love, of joy and glory.

And since all true joy and sweetness springs from love, it is impossible but they must feel unspeakable complacency, in the reciprocal exercise of so holy and pure an affection. But principally, their joy arises from the possession of God himself; by the

clearest knowledge and purest love of his excellences. *They see him as he is.* Sight is the most spiritual and noble sense, that gives the most distinct and evident discovery of its objects. The soul in its exalted state, *sees the king in his beauty*, all the perfections of that infinitely glorious and blessed nature in their brightness and purity. And this sight causes the most ardent love, by which there is an intimate and vital union between the soul and its happiness, and from hence springs perfect delight. *In thy presence is fulness of joy.* It expels all evil that would embitter and lessen our felicity. And this is an admirable privilege for the human nature, that is so sensible of trouble. All complaints and cries, all sighings and sorrows are for ever banished from heaven. If the light of the sun be so pleasant, that every morning revives the world, and renders it new to us which was buried in the darkness of the night: how infinitely pleasant will the light of glory be, that discovers the absolute and universal excellences of the deity: the beauty of his holiness, the perfection of his wisdom, the greatness of his power, and the riches of his mercy? How inexpressibly great is the happiness that proceeds from the illumination of a purified soul, when such is the amiableness of God, that his infinite and eternal felicity arises from the fruition of himself? The joy of heaven is so full and satisfying, that *a thousand years there are but as one day.* Inferior earthly goods presently lose the flower of novelty, and languish in our enjoyment of them. Variety is necessary to put an edge upon our appetites, and quicken our delights: because they are imperfect, and fall short of our expectation. But the object of our blessedness is infinitely great, and produces the same pure and perfect joy for ever. After the longest fruition it never cloy or satiates, but is as fresh and new as the first moment.

Now can there be a more powerful motive to obe-

dience than infinite and eternal blessedness? what can pretend to our affections in competition with it? Carnal pleasures only gratify our viler part the body, in its vilest state; but the joys of heaven are spiritual and sublime, and proportioned to our noblest and most capacious faculties. Earthly delights cannot satisfy our senses, *but the peace of God passes understanding*. One hour's enjoyment of it is better than an eternity spent in the pleasures of sin. What inexcusable madness is it to prefer painted trifles before that inestimable treasure? Who can truly believe there is such an excellent glory, but he must love it and vigorously endeavour to obtain it? Who would not go to the celestial Canaan, though the way lies through a wilderness where no flower or fruit grows? All temporal evils are not only to be endured, but cheerfully embraced in order to the possessing of it. The apostle tells us, *I reckon that the sufferings of the present time, are not comparable with the glory that shall be revealed in us*.

Holiness is the chiefest excellency of man, his highest advantage above inferior beings. It is the supreme beauty of the soul, the resemblance of angels, the image of God himself. In this the perfection of the reasonable nature truly consists, and glory naturally results from it. As a diamond, when its earthy and colourless parts are taken away, shines forth in its lustre; so when the soul is freed from its impurities, and all terene affections, it will appear with a divine brightness. The church shall then be glorious, when cleansed from every spot, and made complete in holiness.

THE POWER OF GOD IN THE PROPAGATION OF THE
GOSPEL.

The great sudden and lasting change that was made in the world by the preaching of the gospel, is a certain argument of the divine power that animated those mean appearances, and that no instrument is weak in God's hands.

The greatness of the change is such that it was only possible to divine power. It is a great miracle to render sight to the blind, but it is more miraculous to enlighten the dark mind, to see the truth and beauty of supernatural mystery, when they are disguised under reproach and sad representations, and effectually to believe them; especially when the inferior appetite is so contrary to faith. It is a prodigy to raise the dead, but it is more admirable to sanctify an habituated sinner. For in comparing the quality of those miracles, that is the greatest, in the performing whereof God is discovered to be the absolute Lord of the greater nature: now the intellectual nature is superior to the corporeal.

Add to this the excellent reformation in the hearts and lives of men. As their understandings, so their wills and affections, the sources of action, were miraculously altered. What the sages of the world could not effect in a few select persons, the gospel hath done in great numbers; nay, raised them above all their feigned ideas, above the highest pitch of their proud philosophy. Those strong and furious passions, which natural reason was as unable to restrain, as a thread of silk is to govern a fierce beast, the gospel hath tamed and brought into order: it hath executed what philosophy durst never enterprize, despairing of success. The gospel overcame all those carnal reluctancies that seemed insupera-

ble; it made the wise men of the world resign the reason to faith; it persuaded carnal men to mortify the flesh, the ambitious to despise secular honours, the voluptuous to renounce their pleasures, the covetous to distribute their goods to the poor, the injured and incensed to forgive their enemies, and all this love to God, an affection unknown to all other laws and institutions.

No religion in the world ever exposed its followers to such sufferings, nor inspired them with such resolution to sustain them. All other religions were productions of the flesh, and being allied together if any time jealousy caused a discord between them yet an open persecution was unusual. But when Christianity first appeared, they all turned the hatred and violence against it, as a foreigner of different extraction: How many living martyrs were exiles for the faith, and deprived of all human consolation? yet they esteemed themselves more blessed in their miseries than others in their pleasures. How many thousands were put to death for the honour of our Redeemer? yet the least thing is the number in comparison of the manner of their suffering. If they had suffered a mild martyrdom, an easy and sudden death, wherein the combat and victory had been finished at a blow, their love and courage had not been so admirable: but they endured torments so various and terrible, that had they not been praised upon them by their enemies, it were incredible that ever malice should be so ingenious to invent, cruelty so hardened to inflict them. If all the fury of hell had come forth to suggest new tortures, they could not have devised worse. Neither was their mere suffering such torments so astonishing, as their readiness to encounter them, and their behaviour under them. They maintained their faith in the presence of the most formidable princes. Some were might by favour, were afraid to escape the comm

persecution, esteeming no death precious but martyrdom. They contended earnestly to suffer, and envied others the honourable ignominy and happy torments that were endured for their beloved Redeemer. We have an instance of their courage in Tiburtius, who thus spake to his judges: Bind me to racks and wheels, condemn me, banish me, load me with chains, burn me, tear me, omit no kind of torment. If you banish me, the smallest corner of the earth shall be to me as the whole world, because I shall find my God there. If you kill me, by the same act you will give me the happy liberty I sigh after, and deliver me from a prison on earth to reign in heaven. If you condemn me to the fire, I have quenched other flames in resisting concupiscence. Ordain what torment you please, it shall not trouble me, since my heart is filled with love to suffer and desire it. They were thankful to those who condemned them, and regarded their executioners with the same eye as St. Peter did the angel that brake off his fetters to restore him to freedom. They cheerfully received them, as those who brought the keys of Paradise in the same hands wherewith they brought their swords. They entered into the fire with joy, and were not only patient but triumphant in their sufferings; as if they had been glorified in their souls, and impassible to the sufferings of their bodies. I have seen, saith Eusebius, the executioners tired with tormenting them, lie down panting and breathing, and others not less fierce, but more fresh, succeed in their cruel service: but I never saw the martyrs weary of sufferings, nor heard them desire a truce, much less deliverance from them. If the judges were softened with their blood, and by the force of nature were compelled to be compassionate, so as to offer them a release if they would but feign to deny Christ; they were filled with indignation, esteeming it the worst injury, that

their persecutors expected they would be grieved but the shadow of infidelity to their dear Saviour. They were ambitious of the longest and most tenacious sufferings, for his sake to be martyrs in every member. They sang the praises of Christ (their tongues being harmonious with the affections of their hearts) in the flames, they preached him from the crosses, they rejoiced in him as their only good in the midst of devouring beasts. Briefly, they preserved an inviolable faith to him, notwithstanding the most furious batteries against them. The barbarous enemy might tear their hearts from their breasts, but never Christ from their hearts, to which they were inseparably united by love, stronger than the most cruel death.

THE POWER OF GOD IN THE FINAL SALVATION OF THE CHURCH.

The divine power shall be gloriously manifested in the complete salvation of the church at the end of the world. Jesus Christ as Mediator is invested with sovereign *power in heaven and earth*: and in that quality he shall exercise it, till our salvation is finished. *For he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. But we see not yet all things put under him.* Although those persons and things that are degenerated from their original are entirely subject to him; the angels obey his will, universal nature governed by his providence; the heavens, the earth, the waters, and all things produced from them, never resist the direction of his hand; yet there are others that fell from their integrity, and some things consequent to man's rebellion, which either oppose the power of Christ, or are not yet actually subdued, and they are the enemies of our salvation, Satan, sin, and death. Now the perfect freedom of the church

In all these, will be the last glorious act of Christ's
 al office. And it is observable, the day of judg-
 it is called the day of redemption, with respect
 he final accomplishment of our felicity, that was
 chased by the infinite price of his sufferings.
 The day of Christ's death was the day of redemption,
 o our right and title; for then our ransom was
 y paid, and it is by the immortal efficacy of his
 od that we partake of the glorious liberty of the
 s of God: but the actual enjoyment of it shall be
 he last day. Therefore the perfection of all our
 itual privileges is referred to that time, when
 h our last enemy shall be overcome. The apostle
 h, *And not only they, but ourselves also, which have*
first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan
in ourselves, waiting for the adoption; to wit, the
mption of our bodies. During the present life, we
 taken into God's family, in the quality of his
 dren; but the most solemn act of our adoption
 ll be at the last day. In this there is a similitude
 ween Christ and his members: for although he
 the Son of God by his marvellous conception, and
 ed by him while he performed his ministry upon
 earth; yet all the testimonies of God's favour to
 , were not comparable to the declaration of it in
 ing him from the grave: then, in the face of
 ven and earth, he said, *Thou art my Son, this day*
I begotten thee. So in this life God acknowledges
 treats us as his children, he clothes us with the
 teousness of his Son, feeds us with his word, de-
 ds us from our spiritual enemies; but the most
 ic declaration of his favour shall be in the next
 , when all the *children of the resurrection* shall be
 n in a day. Add further: although the souls of
 evers, immediately upon their separation, are
 ived into heaven, and during the sleep of death
 y admirable visions of glory: yet their blessed-
 s is imperfect, in comparison of that excellent

degree which shall be enjoyed at the resurrection. As the Roman generals, after a complete conquest, first entered the city privately, and having obtained license of the senate, made their triumphant entry with all the magnificence and splendour becoming the greatness of their victories: so after a faithful Christian hath *fought the good fight*, and is come off *more than a conqueror*, he enters privately into the celestial city; but when the body is raised to immortality, he shall then, in the company and with the acclamations of the holy angels, have a glorious entry into it. I will briefly consider why the bodies of the saints shall be raised, and how the divine power will be manifested in that last act.

The general reason is from God's justice. As the economy of Divine Providence requires there must be a future state, when God shall sit upon a judicial throne to weigh the actions of all men, and to render to every one according to their quality; so it is as necessary that the person be judged, and not one part alone.

The special reason of the saints' resurrection is their union with Christ: for he is not only our Redeemer and Prince, but our second Adam, the same in grace as the first was in nature. Now as from the first the soul was destroyed by sin and the body by death, so the second restores them both to their primitive state; the one by grace, the other by a glorious resurrection. Accordingly the apostle saith, *that by man came death, and by man came the resurrection from the dead*. Christ removed the moral and natural impossibility of our glorious resurrection: the moral, by the infinite merit of his death, whereby divine justice is satisfied, that otherwise would not permit the guilty to be restored to eternal life: and the natural, by his rising from the grave to a glorious immortality. For his infinite power can do the same in all believers. It is observable the apostle infers

the resurrection of believers from that of Christ, not only as the cause but the original example. For the members must be conformed to the head, the children to their father, the younger to the elder brother. Therefore he is called *the first-fruits of them that sleep: and the first-begotten of the dead*. In Christ's resurrection ours is so fully assured, that the event is infallible. Now no less than infinite power is requisite to raise the bodies of the saints from the dust, and to transform them into the similitude of Christ's.

To raise them. Nothing is more astonishing to nature, than that the bodies which after so many ages in the perpetual circulation of the elements have passed into a thousand different forms, one part of them being resolved into water, another evaporated into air, another turned into dust, should be restored to their first state. What wisdom is requisite to separate the parts so mixed and confounded! When the trumpet of the archangel shall sound the universal Jubilee, and call forth the dead from all their receptacles, when the elements, as faithful depositories, shall effectively restore what was committed to them, how admirable will the power of God appear! No less than infinite power is able to change the raised bodies into the likeness of Christ's. The apostle speaks with an exaggeration of it: *for our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself*. This resemblance will be only in the person of believers. All men shall rise to be judged, but not all to be transformed. There is a resurrection to death as well as to life. Unhappy resurrection! which only serves to make the body the food of eternal death. But the saints who endeavour to be like to Christ in purity, shall then have a perfect conformity to him in glory and immortality. How glorious the

body of Christ is, we may conjecture in part by what the apostle relates to Agrippa : *At mid-day, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me ; which was no other but the light of the face of Christ that struck him with blindness. One ray of this reflecting upon the first martyr St. Stephen in his sufferings, gave an angelical glory to his countenance. And St. John tells us, when he appears, we shall be like him.* He alludes to the rising of the sun, but with this difference, when the sun appears in the morning, the stars are made invisible ; but the bodies of the saints shall be clothed with a sun-like lustre, and shine in the midst of Christ's glory.' Omnipotence alone that subdues all things, can raise and refine them from their dross unto such an admirable brightness. The angels will be surprised with wonder to see millions of stars spring out of the dust. *The Lord Jesus Christ will be admired in all them that believe.*

Their bodies shall be raised to a glorious immortality. In this the general resurrection is different from that which was particular, as of Lazarus. By the one death was overcome and put to flight, only for some time ; for his second life was no more exempt from death than his first : but by the other, *death shall be swallowed up in victory*, and lose its force for ever.

THOMAS GOODWIN, D. D.



FROM

AN EXPOSITION

OF THE

EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS.

THIS epistle contains more of the mysteries of Christ than any other. I find our apostle boasting of none of his other writings, but of this, ch. iii. 3, 4, "As I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ." There is not the like speech uttered by him of any of his epistles: he makes this epistle at once the most full evidence and demonstration of that transcendant way of his receiving the gospel by immediate revelation. And so sublime was the matter contained in it, as that it argued this original, and that it could come no other way than by immediate revelation; as the highest specimen of the depth and profoundness of his knowledge, and as his choicest exercise to shew his Christian learning by; so that as elsewhere he professed to these same Ephesians, that he had, when present with them, declared all the counsel of God to them, (Acts xx.

27); so now absent, he appears to have singled out to utter in this epistle the utmost depths of that counsel.

That supereminent self-denial, which appeared in many of these converted Ephesians, even in point of knowledge, in their renouncing all that excellency of learning, which was then the glory of that city in the eyes of all the nations, as a testimony whereof they sacrificed the very books themselves, (Acts xix. 19,) might be the reason why God honoured them with an epistle so sublime, by way of recompense. Whatever excellence any one hath been eminent in, or prized most afore conversion, but now doth undervalue, and as Christ's word is, hates and forsakes for Christ's sake, in that very thing Christ as apparently maketh recompense an hundred fold. These Ephesians forsook the most exquisite earthly wisdom, and God therefore honours them with this divine epistle, made as public as their self-denial; in which God from heaven enlargeth this apostle's heart, to make a profound discovery of the sublimest and deepest mysteries that heaven affordeth, that were to be communicated to any of the sons of men, or that were lawful to be uttered. (2 Cor. xii. 4.) They burn their books that are valued at many thousands, (Acts xix. 19,) and therefore the apostle's heart is enlarged towards them, to bring forth that "treasure of knowledge hid in Christ," "the unsearchable riches of Christ." (Eph. iii. 8.) Thus Moses, undervaluing the Egyptian learning, wherein he excelled, (Acts vii. 22,) as well as the pleasures of that court, having an eye to recompense of the reward to come, was according in a proportion, recompensed even in this life; with being exalted to be a king over the people of God, a greater dignity than even Egypt afforded (Deut. xxxiii. 5,) for his leaving the Egyptian or so with being made the prophet of the Old T

ment, for his renouncing of their learning: to whom God revealed himself and his law as never to any other prophet. (Numb. xii. 6.) He was the giver of that law which, by the confession of all the heathen, excelled theirs.

We read in Acts xx. 29, that the apostle calling together the elders of the church, by the spirit of prophecy and revelation, said, "I know this, that after my departure shall grievous wolves enter in among you; also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." Now, then, to prevent their being carried away with any of their errors, whatever they might prove to be, he writeth this epistle, to establish them aforehand in the greatest truths of the gospel.

If a Christian's judgment be well and thoroughly grounded in the doctrine of God's free grace and eternal love, and of redemption through Jesus Christ alone, and in the most spiritual inward operations of God's Spirit, experimentally communicated: that will fence them against all errors, and from taking in any falsehood of great moment. Their souls being well "shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace," to use the apostle's similitude, (ch. vi. 15,) then, as they are temptation-proof in respect to sin or practical doubtings, which is the apostle's scope there; so, when their judgments are thus shod with the doctrines of grace, they are error-proof also with respect to any dangerous heresy.

"Grace be to you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ."

Ministers being set up as stewards of the good blessings of the gospel, "to bring the glad tidings of peace," their well-wishings of grace and peace, and of all the blessings of the gospel are special

means sanctified by God to bring down those blessings upon them that obey their ministry, and therefore God bade them, as to preach peace, so to wish peace, (Luke x. 5,) even that peace which they preached.

God bestows not grace as he is a Creator, or Author of nature in common to men as his creatures; but as he is become a Father in Christ, and so bestows it in a peculiar love, out of which he will give all good things. (Matt. vii. 11.)

We look up to God the Father as the fountain of grace; and we look up to Jesus Christ as the fountain of our peace: but we are to look to the Holy Ghost as the revealer of both these from both.

Let this benediction be a directory to us what to make the more ordinary and continual scope of our desires and pursuits, even the obtaining peace with God and grace of God: seek this peace, and ensue it; peace with God through Christ. And yet learn to seek grace also; not to rest in peace, but to seek God's favour. Good and evangelical spirits cannot content themselves with peace; they must have grace too; God's heart and love to be set upon them, his goodwill. Seek to be pardoned; but above all, seek to be beloved.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

To bless God is to wish well to, and speak well of God, out of goodwill to God himself, and out of a sense of his goodness to ourselves. God loves your good word, to be spoken well of by you; rejoiceth in your well wishes, and to hear from you expressions of rejoicings in his own independent blessedness. "God blessed for ever, Amen." Although God is blessed in himself, and so must be for evermore, yet our "so be" is to be added; we

thereby uttering our goodwill, and it is well taken by him. It is not an Amen set to a blessing of *invocation*, but an amen of joyful acclamation and congratulation, expressing our rejoicing and complacency in his happiness, declaring, *that so we would have it*. He loves our goodwill in it more than the thing. He takes it unkindly at our hands, if we rejoice not in his personal blessedness primarily: and thus as “we love him because he loves us first,” so we bless him (because he blesseth us first) out of a sense of his goodness to us. And yet it must rise higher in the end, and in heaven it will do so, even purely to bless him for himself, or else we love him not nor bless him, as the great God is to be loved and blessed by us.

It is an infinite favour, we are admitted to, not only to pray to God to obtain all blessings, and to give thanks to him when we have them: but beyond all this, to bless him for all the blessedness that is in him, and for him to take in our Amen, as in like manner he doth our faith, as a seal to his truth and faithfulness. Oh, what is it! he was not content to be blessed alone, but he must bless us, and make us partakers thereof. But further, as if not perfect without us, he blesseth himself in our returns and echoes of blessing to his blessedness that so we in him, and he in us, might be blest for ever more. Amen.

Many good souls find this an internal evidence of their own future blessedness, that when wanting assurance of God's love to themselves, they can yet bless God for his being good to others, in the same condition with themselves, out of their love to God and to the good of others' souls. If thou findest such elevation of spirits in the event, and spend them much more in blessing God, that “he is the God and Father of Christ,” this is high and most divine.

"Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

Love in fathers is that principle, that doth of itself provoke them to wish the greatest good to their children ; and when they have it not in their own power to bestow, if they are holy men, and have an interest in God the fountain of all good, they invoke God to bestow it, which we use to call blessing a child. "If you then being evil," says Christ, that is, full of self love, (that of itself would tempt you to keep and retain to yourselves, and not willingly give away any good thing) "yet know how," that is, have the hearts and the affections, by a natural instinct, to spy out the things for your children, which you judge to be best ; "how much more shall your Father, which is in heaven," who to this end was pleased to become a Father to you, and has all in heaven to bestow ; "give good things to them that ask him : " Even that God who is styled the BLESSED ONE in scripture, who is an ocean of all blessedness, seeking an outlet for itself to communicate to creatures whom he hath loved and chosen : and who by what he finds to be natural to himself towards his own son, "whom he blesseth for ever," Psalm xlv. 2. for his sake, and in relation to us, is farther pleased to pour forth all blessings also upon us, having become in Christ a Father to us ; and so bearing a good-will to us in Christ as members of him, and a spouse to him.

That the whole of the gospel was expressed to Abraham, and wrapped up in the term "blessing," the avowed explications and interpretations made thereof do undeniably declare. Thus after Christ's ascension, Acts iii. 25, speaking to the Jews, St. Peter says, "Ye are the children of the covenant God made, saying to Abraham, In thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed ;" which he expounds unto them

thus, "unto you first God sent his son Jesus to bless you." v. 26. "God preached the gospel to Abraham, saying, In thee shall nations be blessed." Gal. iii. 8. Abraham is styled "the blessed of the most high God." Gen. xiv. 19. And also the children of God are said to be "blessed with faithful Abraham." Gal. iii. 9; and again, Heb. vi. 13, 14. "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, surely blessing I will bless thee:" which verse 17 is said to contain, "the whole of his counsel to the heirs of his promise;" and that "to show the immutability of that" his counsel, "he confirmed it by an oath."

Hence, therefore, although the gospel in most things speaks greater things than the Old Testament, and in higher terms, yet hath it not altered, nor can it better this. When Christ himself began to preach the gospel, the first word he therein utters is, "Blessed are the poor in spirit;" Matt. v. 3. and because he could not add to this, he does but repeat it over and over, as the general that contained in it:—"The kingdom of heaven," v. 3, "comfort," v. 4, "inheriting the earth," v. 5, "being filled" with all good, v. 6, "obtaining mercy," v. 7, "seeing God," v. 8, adoption to be "God's children," v. 9, and if there be any other particular, all are summed up in this word, "blessed." Each and every particle of our salvation or happiness being a blessing, all the gospel can say is but "*to bless*;" which is therefore "the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ." Rom. xv. 29. All that Christ would do when he ascended, was but "to bless:" and after Christ's ascension the last book of the Gospel, the Revelation, doth continually use the same style; and at the latter day, when heaven's doors are set open to enter in, their everlasting happiness is uttered by, "come ye blessed."

When Jacob blessed his twelve sons, and in them

their posterity, the twelve tribes; in the conclusion of that blessing it is said, "Every one according to his blessing he blessed them." Gen. xlix. 28. Each tribe had some one eminent earthly blessing bestowed on them: none there are said to be blessed with all blessings. But when God comes to open his treasures of blessings in Christ, and to profess to bless indeed, he "blesseth with all blessings." Every child of his he blesseth, even with the "fulness of the blessing of the gospel;" for when God gives us Christ, and blesseth us in him, "how shall he not with him freely give us all things." Having given you my Son, take all else, and take all freely; having given the greater so willingly, sure you shall have all the rest, which are the lesser, more willingly.

"In heavenly places" or things.

In distinction from the tenure of the blessings promised in the old dispensation, which were in the letter earthly and temporal, but in the expectation of the patriarchs were heavenly: "they desired a better country, that is a heavenly." Such a city or country was the import of God's styling himself the God of Abraham, &c. For God being so great a God, so full of blessedness in himself, would never have appropriated himself in so near a relation and style, of being their God, their portion, and their inheritance, upon conditions so low and mean, so far below himself, as to give them only earthly things, and no other habitation, than that one poor corner of the earth, Canaan. God would have been ashamed, it is implied by the Apostle's words, to have been called their God upon such terms only; he had prepared for them another city or country, even an heavenly, where his throne and glory are.

All the graces that we have are not only spiritual, to fit us for communion with God on earth, but they

are preparations, making us more fit for the inheritance in light, to see God face to face. And they all tend to lead us in the way to heaven, and to bring us to heaven at last; and have all the promises of things heavenly annexed to and entailed upon them,—“Follow me, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven,” says Christ, Luke xviii. 22; and “a more enduring substance,” Heb. x. 34.

There are things spiritual, which apart from graces are not spiritual blessings, though called spiritual gifts; as faith of miracles, gifts of tongues, and divine wisdom in the knowledge of scripture, which in themselves are nothing in comparison of the least degree of spiritual heavenly graces, as faith unfeigned and lively hope, which do accompany us to the very door of heaven, and sincere love which goes in with us, and abides with us for ever. These other gifts, though spiritual, are not of themselves spiritual blessings in heavenlies, if love and faith be wanting; for they interest not the person in whom they are in heavenlies. 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3. “Though I speak with the tongues of men, or of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.” These, one that is a child in christianity may value for a while, (v. 11, “when I was a child I spake as a child,” &c.) but after he is grown up, then others come in esteem with him. To the like purpose we find him speaking, Heb. vi. 4, 5, preferring infinitely the least grain of true heavenly grace, such as sincere love to the saints, unto the greatest abundance of the other, as better things, v. 9, 10:

· *“According to the good pleasure of his will.”*

Of all the things which God willeth; this alone, comparatively is his good pleasure, even our salvation: he is pleased with nothing that he willeth, so as he is with this. It is true he punisheth men everlastingly; but he doth it as a judge that condemneth a malefactor with a kind of regret. And this may be truly said of him, that it is a mixed action; God hath something in him that moves him to the contrary, for he loveth his creature, only other ends prevail. But when he cometh to save men, here is the “good pleasure of his will;” his whole heart is poured forth in this. Jer. xxxii. 41. “I will assuredly establish them with my whole heart and my whole soul.” God, when he shows mercy, when he predestinates unto glory, doth it with his whole heart; there is nothing in him to contradict it; here is no mixture in this, all that is in him agreeth with it. It is therefore not only “according to his good will;” but it is the most pleasing to him of all that he willeth. It is according to the good pleasure of his will.

“He hath made us accepted in the beloved.”

The angels are elect, but we no where read of them that they are elect in Christ. They are the sons of God by creation, but not adopted sons through Christ. They are highly favoured of God, but it is no where said that they are “accepted in the beloved.” God hath loved the angels with a special love, but it is no where said, that he hath loved angels, as Christ said of his disciples: “Thou hast loved them as thou hast loved me.” Jesus Christ is God’s beloved in an eminent manner. Look, as God put all light into the sun, and that diffuseth and communicateth light unto all the stars; so Jesus Christ hath drawn all

the love of God to himself, and through him it is diffused upon us. He is "the Son of his love." Col. i. 13. Christ, hath as it were, engrossed all God's love unto him: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Indeed God is not well pleased with any of the creatures, but as they have relation to him, and are his servants. Otherwise "he findeth folly in his angels." Job iv. 18. They would not have pleased him, had they not come under his Son, and had relation to him some way or other, and subserved to his glory. In loving his Son, he loved them, but he loveth us as being planted into him.

Is Christ then God's beloved, with and in whom he is so fully pleased? and is he not thy beloved? Why? Is thy narrow soul more curious about an object for its love, than God himself is? Oh let him be to each of us our beloved! If he be God's beloved, he may well be thine. Is he able to satisfy God's vast thoughts; and is he not able to satisfy thee? God himself is satisfied and at rest in him, ("I was daily his delight," says Christ, Prov. viii. 30.) and wouldst thou be happier than God? Is he God's beloved Son, in whom he is well-pleased, and wilt thou be pleased in any thing else save Christ?

Go therefore unto God to be accepted only in and through his beloved. Here is the greatest and strongest argument for it that can be. It is not perfect holiness, nor that complete glory we shall have in heaven, that makes us accepted with God, in comparison with this, to be considered and accepted in the beloved. And wilt thou now go and bring thy imperfect graces and duties? Art thou in glory yet? Art thou perfectly holy? If thou wert, yet consider "he hath accepted us in the beloved," which let thy soul look out for, notwithstanding all thy grace and holiness.

*"He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and
prudence."*

There is a fulness in the fountain, and a fulness in the vessel; but in the fountain, as that which communicateth, which bestoweth, which fills the vessel; and in the vessel, as having received all from the fountain. So we are said to abound in grace, when he hath filled us with it; "of his fulness," which is the fulness of the fountain, "we have received grace for grace." John i. 16. Now it is the abundance of the fountain that is here meant; not only that God did cause wisdom to abound, but that he out of abundance of grace in himself bestoweth wisdom.

When you would set a right value upon any blessing bestowed upon you, you are not to value it chiefly by the blessing itself bestowed, but by the grace in God, out of which it comes. He doth not say he gave abundance of wisdom, and abundance of prudence, but he abounded in grace, in giving these. The apostle would have them set the value of this blessing upon the grace which was the fountain of it, "Wherein, or in which, he hath abounded towards us." My brethren, learn to value spiritual and temporal blessings, not by the things themselves, but by the love of God, from which they come. A small blessing may be out of abundance of love: so in what we do for God; a cup of cold water; a widow's mite. God may abound in grace to thee in bestowing it. What is the reason that many good souls, which have true grace wrought in their hearts, are so unthankful? They look to the grace wrought in them, and they see there is but little of that, and therefore they value all by what they find in themselves by the blessing wrought. Whereas that little grace thou hast, that little faith, be it but as a grain of mustard seed, proceeds out of abundance of grace in God; "Wherein he hath abounded toward us" in working the least

beginning of true wisdom and prudence in the least saint. God abounds infinitely in his love to thee, when thou hast but the least beginnings of grace in thee.

If you mark Paul's expression in 1 Tim. i. 14, he doth not say that his faith and love in Christ were exceeding abundant; but the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant in bestowing faith and love upon him. He looks not at the quantity of his faith or love, but he looks at the grace of both; and how doth he magnify that? He had said before two things of himself; first, "I was a persecutor and injurious," I hated the saints; but he saith also, "I did it ignorantly in unbelief: I was an unbeliever as well as a persecutor. Now for God to work faith instead of unbelief, and love to the saints instead of persecution and hatred of them, the grace of God was exceeding abundant herein.

"Having made known unto us the mystery of his will."

You see what is the pith of the gospel: it is the mystery of God's will: to know but this, that God will save sinners in the blood of Christ, is the pith of the gospel. This is that which is essential to salvation. And you see too, that it is but a small thing to know that God will save sinners in Christ. How gracious hath God been; he hath not laid upon you all the hard things in the gospel, which the learned know, and many believers that have large understandings know, as that without which you cannot be saved. But this is the sum of all, that God will save sinners; it is the mystery of his will; dost thou know it? hath that taken thy heart? Thou knowest that which will save thee, if thou knowest no more; thou knowest that which faith may feed upon, and which will make thee happy everlastingly.

See the grace of God in revealing the gospel to the weak as well as to the strong. God doth lead you

hearts with but one truth, " I will save sinners in and through Christ." And why did he choose faith of all graces, to save a man by ? Because the poorest in the world, the weakest understanding, can believe and trust. When he heareth that God will save sinners, he is able to trust God as strongly and as firmly as the wisest man in the world.

God hath abounded not to ministers only, but to all his saints, in all wisdom and prudence, and hath made known the mystery of his will to them. Let them all get what knowledge they can of it. Would that all the saints in the world understood every tittle of this book : then our sermons would be understood, and we should preach with ease. God desires this, and we desire it, to have all men know the mystery of his will.

" Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers."

Let us a little take notice of the grace of Paul, to quicken our own hearts by the example, and consider how enlarged his heart was in thankfulness to God, for the salvation of the souls of others, as well as in desires to save them. 2 Thess. ii. 13. " We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." It was not a matter of liberty, it was a matter of duty, " we are bound." And he speaks this not as having been moved so much by his own interest in being the instrument of converting them ; but he speaks of it as a brother, a member of that body. Here lieth much of the communion of saints : this is one great and high part of it ; this is angel's grace, to rejoice at the

conversion of sinners, and this will be one great exercise of our grace in heaven, that we shall be thankful to God for his having chosen and saved every soul there. This will make up one great part of the happiness of heaven, that each saint will rejoice in the salvation of all and every one as in his own; which will be like the reflection of a multitude of looking glasses, so placed and disposed, as that every one reflects the image of itself upon the other.

In 1 Thess. iii. 9, St. Paul is so deeply affected, that he doth not know how to express his thankfulness to God. "What thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God." This is the happiness of a Christian and of a holy heart, when made exceeding spiritual, he hath all that concerneth God's glory to rejoice in. This did fill his heart so full of joy, that it kept him up in the midst of all his distresses, v. 7, "we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith." Where is the spirit of Paul?

If men do not love them in whom they see the image of God, certainly they do not love God himself, whom they see not; as on the contrary also, if they do love that image, certainly they love God. If men's eyes cannot endure the light of a candle, I will never believe they will endure the light of the sun.

"The spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God."

The knowledge of God here is communion with God, intimate knowledge of him; in which he would have the Ephesians to grow up. There are two ways of a Christian's having communion with God, which the scripture holdeth forth, and which the saints have experience of: the one is a way of *wisdom*, and the other is a way of *revelation*.

The way of wisdom is knowing God by faith, making use of sanctified reason, taking in several truths of God, laying them altogether, working them upon a man's heart by meditation, arguing God's excellency out of this and out of that, and so raising up a man's soul to the admiring of him and delighting in him.

Then there is a way of revelation. The Holy Ghost comes down into a man's heart sometimes in prayer by a beam from heaven; he sees more at once of God, of the glory of God, astounding thoughts of God, enlarged apprehensions of God; and hath more communion and converse with God.

The apostle, because he would have them perfect Christians, prayeth for both; that they may grow up both in a way of wisdom, so to have communion with God, and in a way of revelation, likewise, that God might often come and visit their spirits in a more immediate manner, and shew himself to them. In the one, the Spirit works in us by applying himself to our own thoughts; but in the other, a man is in the Spirit, as it is said of St. Paul, "he went bound in the Spirit;" and of St. John, "He was in the Spirit on the Lord's-day." The one is the common standing light of faith, that goeth with you to duties, and causeth your heart to cleave to God: but the other is comparatively an extraordinary light, "We walk by faith and not by sight." Yet Christians now and then get a sight, a revelation; comparatively to that of wisdom, though it be not that sight we have of God in heaven.

I shall express it to you by this similitude: as we walk in light in the day, though it be dark and cloudy, we have light enough to do our work; though we do not see the sun, we know the sun shineth: so there is an ordinary standing light of faith, that causeth you to cleave to God and obey him, and it is enough for you to help you to do your



work. But suppose upon a sudden, in a cloudy day, a cloud should break, and a beam be let in upon you that you see the sun; such kind of irradiations hath the Spirit of God sometimes in the hearts of his people.

Oftentimes God doth deal with weak understandings, that are very holy, in this way; for if they were shut up unto knowing God, by a way of sanctified reason, they that have large understandings would have infinite advantage of them, and they would grow little in grace and little in holiness; therefore God makes a supply by breaking in upon their spirits by such irradiations as these are. Weak understandings oftentimes know God much in such a way of revelation, when they cannot in a way of wisdom. But to know him in a way of wisdom, and to have communion with him in that way of revelation, makes a strong Christian fit for the profit of others.

He does not pray that they may have a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of truths, to open scripture, to have an immediate light thus from heaven; to be able to say, this I know by divine revelation to be the meaning of such a place; or in matters of controversy to be able to say, this I know by divine revelation to be the truth—no; there is no such revelation now: it is the "knowledge of him:" it is only this in a way of personal communion between God and a man's soul. It is not a revelation to draw men from the world; but usually God cometh down upon the wings of some promise, or some word of his, and in that promise putting an immediate beam of light from heaven revealeth himself to a man's soul, that he knoweth more of God, than he hath learned all his life before.

“ And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.”

“ The greatness of his power.” When the apostle speaks of the power of creating, he saith “ his power and godhead.” (Rom. i. 20.) When he speaks of the work of grace and salvation, then he calleth it the greatness of his power. You no where read of the “ riches” of his power, or of his “ powers;” but you read of his “ mercies,” and “ riches of mercy;” his power consisteth of greatness: “ Great is our Lord, and great is his power.” (Psalm cxlvii. 5.)

Look how great God is in himself, so great is his power. If you will know, therefore, how great his power is, consider how great a God he is, and all the power that is in this God is engaged to save a poor believer. There is no creature that hath a being but hath a power to do some thing: one creature hath power to do one thing, and another creature hath power to do another thing. One of an infinite being must have an infinite power; as he is in being so must he be in working. “ The Lord is great, and great is his power,” his power is as great as himself.

Toward the saints, and for their good and their salvation, God doth engage the uttermost of all his attributes, the uttermost of power, the EXCEEDING greatness of his power. There is a peculiarness of power, that works in us that believe; a power equal to that which works in all things else. “ According to the power that works in us;” “ according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all

things to himself." (Phil. iii. 21 ; Eph. iii. 20.) Take all the power whereby he is able to do any thing else, and it is but equal to this which he works in the saints.

The grace of God in Christ, and the salvation of man by Christ, was a new stage God set up to bring all his attributes upon, to act their parts to the uttermost. He sheweth mercy, nay, he sheweth riches of mercy to wicked men, the riches of his goodness and long-suffering. (Rom. ii. 4.) But when he cometh to speak of mercy to the saints, he doth not only call it riches of mercy, but the exceeding great riches : " the exceeding riches of his grace." (Eph. ii. 7.)

God sheweth his power in hell ; so it is Rom. ix. 22, " What if God willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known ; " and believe it, a blow struck in wrath hath a great deal of power in it ; for anger stirreth up power, and draweth forth the mighty power of God. But what followeth comparatively in his working toward the saints, (v. 23,) " and the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy." Though he sheweth a glorious power in his condemning men, yet he sheweth a greater riches of glory, of mercy, and of all attributes else, in saving men, and bringing men to heaven. The power that love stirreth up is a greater power than what wrath stirreth up in God. I will give you a reason of it ; nothing commandeth power and strength more than love : " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy strength." (Mark xii. 30.) Doth God love thee ? He loves thee with all his strength, as thou art to love him, " I will rejoice over them to do them good with my whole heart, and with my whole soul." (Jer. xxxii. 41.) Now when he sheweth forth the power of his wrath when he cometh to condemn men, yet it is not with all his heart ; there is something that regrets within him, for he considers that they are his crea-

tures, and he doth not will the death of a sinner simply for itself; for there is something in him that makes a reluctancy; there is not his whole power in this, though it be the power of his wrath. But when he cometh to shew forth his power out of love, that draws his whole heart; therefore you shall find in scripture that mercy is called God's strength, because when he will have mercy, all the strength and power of God accompany it. "Let the power of my God be great," (Num. xiv. 17); what to do? to destroy them? no, but "according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is long-suffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression;—pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy." His mercy is here called his strength, because that love doth draw forth all the strength of God.

You therefore that believe, comfort yourselves with the exceeding greatness of his power that is engaged to you; know the exceeding greatness of his power to you-ward. It is a power that will do for you above all your thoughts; it exceedeth that way. It is a power that will do beyond all resistance. "If God be for us, who shall be against us?" "The Father "saith Christ" is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." It is a reigning power, a power that carries all before it. The words, "the might of his strength," may signify the sovereignty of his power; it is a conquering power, "He will have mercy upon whom he will have mercy," and "who hath resisted his will?" When you come to beg pardon for your sins, what say you? Lord "forgive us our trespasses." What arguments do you use? "For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory."

And let me raise up your thoughts to consider with yourselves, if the exceeding greatness of his power be engaged in you and to you, to do for you,

what then is the thing that is answerable to this power? If that power that wrought in Christ to raise him from death to glory shall work in us, Lord, whither will it bring us? What! will God bring you to salvation? It must, then, be a thing answerable to the power. What glory, therefore, must it be which God will shew forth in the saints at the latter day? "The heavens declare the power and glory of God;" yea, but the estate of the saints in heaven declares the exceeding greatness of his power, and what a glory then must that needs be!

If exceeding greatness of mercy shall be the contriver of what good you shall have, and if the exceeding greatness of power shall be the worker, and undertake to work all that mercy doth continue; what will God do with you then? What will God bring you to, upon whom he will shew forth, ere he hath done, the exceeding riches of his grace, the exceeding greatness of his power.

THE POWER OF GOD IN COMFORTING WEAKNESS OF FAITH.

What is the great doubt that possesseth the hearts of Christians, that usually takes up their thoughts? It is not so much a questioning the power of God to raise them up hereafter, as it is the power of God to keep them for the present; therefore, when the apostle would comfort their hearts, that they should attain this glory, he doth not pray only that they may know the power that should raise up saints at the latter day, but the power that should keep them, that they might know the power that is engaged to usward that believe, to persevere in to this glory. When Christ came to raise up Lazarus, and told Martha, "Thy brother shall rise again,"—"I know," saith she, "that he shall rise again at the resurrec-

tion of the last day." She doubted not of this; this did not trouble her; but she only doubted of the power of Christ to raise him presently: "By this time," saith she, "he stinketh, for he hath lain four days in the grave." It was the present resurrection she doubted of, and the power of Christ in that; "therefore," saith he, "said I not unto thee, That if thou believedst thou shouldst see the glory of God," see it presently.

Faith is perfected with power. (2 Thess. i. 11.) You shall find in scripture, that the keeping of a man so as temptations do not overcome him, is not attributed to moral persuasions, to the liberty of the will being assisted and strengthened; but the victory is attributed to the strength of God that is in us. "He that is born of God overcometh the world, because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." (1 John iv. 4.)

GOD'S EXCEEDING GREATNESS OF POWER IN THE NEW CREATION.

The creation of the new creature is of a higher kind than the first creation, because that grace is the most excellent of all God's creatures. "Of his own will he hath begotten us; that we should be a kind of first fruits," (James i. 18,) the eminent first fruits "of all his creatures," the choicest of all; for so doth the grace given by regeneration make a man. (Col. ii. 11.) The sanctification of a sinner is called the "circumcising the heart," that we may love God, a "circumcision made without hands." (Deut. xxx. 6.) The phrase "made without hands," is used only of three things, whereof grace or the new creature is one. It is used of that glory, which God will put upon his saints and children hereafter in heaven: "we have a house not made with hands."

(2 Cor. v. 1.) It is used secondly of the framing of the body of Christ, the human nature of Christ, both body and soul, and the uniting it to the godhead; that human nature, so united, is called a "tabernacle not made with hands." (Heb. ix. 11.) And, thirdly, of the sanctification of a sinner, and working holiness and grace in him, circumcising the heart to love God, a "circumcision made without hands." In Heb. ix. 11, when he said, "that the body of Christ is a tabernacle made without hands," he adds by way of explication, not of this creation, (so the original is,) it is not of the old creation, it is of a more transcendent creation: and so is grace.

In Acts vii. 48, Stephen proveth that God will not dwell in temples made with hands, from Isaiah lxvi. 1, 2. Now mark what the prophet saith, "Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool, what house will ye build me, saith the Lord of Hosts? or what is the place of my rest." Therefore man's hands cannot make him a house good enough. Nay, heaven and earth, the old creation, is not good enough for him: "hath not my hands made all these things?" What is it he will have now to dwell in, that both exceedeth all the houses man can build, and exceedeth the house that himself hath made, the material heavens, (the earth is his footstool)? It is a gracious heart: "to him will I look that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

GOD'S MIGHTY POWER IN WORKING FAITH AND A
SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING.

In the understanding, to understand things spiritually and aright, there must be an almighty power, to put a new principle in you, to make you capable to believe and know spiritual things, to work a

principle of faith ; such as to work sight in a blind eye.

That you may know things aright, that you may approve, in a spiritual way, of their goodness and excellences ; you must be metamorphosed (Rom. xii. 2,) in your minds, you must have a new form come in to your understanding.

For a man to have true spiritual understanding, which yet men are apt in their thoughts to slight, and think to be the least of all things to be wrought, it must have no less power than what went to the creation.

This new creation, this new understanding, giveth a new eye, but still this eye will not help a man to see ; this new understanding will not see, except God doth somewhat more ; it will not see aright and spiritually. It is for the Holy Ghost to create in your understandings a new image of things, a new representation of things. Faith is expressed by an act of sight, " He that seeth the Son, and believeth on him," John vi. 40 ; such a sight wrought in the mind, as all the men in the world have not, nor are any way capable of. If all the angels in heaven should go and describe God and Christ on their own knowledge, and all their excellences ; if a man should go and quicken up his understanding, yea, and have the utmost assistance of the Holy Ghost (so as not to renew his understanding), all these will but raise up a shadow of Christ, in comparison of what a godly man hath of him in his heart.

There is a false knowledge, a knowledge of a false Jesus, but an appearance of him, a shadow of him, which all carnal men that live under the preaching of the gospel have ; but if you have seen Jesus in truth, Eph. iv. 21, this followeth upon it, you will put off the old man, and put on the new.

All the world yieldeth, that the difference of men's knowledge ariseth from the different image or picture

of things the mind takes in. If you take two men, and the one sees the picture of a man, and the other sees the man himself; he that hath seen the man himself hath such a knowledge of him as he that hath seen but the picture hath not, and cannot have, except he see the man himself. Why? Because there is a different image begotten in the mind and fancy of him that hath seen the man, and him that hath seen only the picture. Hence ariseth difference of knowledge.

The Holy Ghost, when he reneweth the understanding of a man, doth beget in him by his almighty power another representation of Christ and of God, and of all spiritual things in their spiritual nature; whereas other men have but the picture of them, they do not know them as the truth is in Jesus. He doth more lively represent God to a man than all the scripture simply, or than all the works of God, yea, than it was done to Adam: "For eye hath not seen, neither hath the ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man," (since the beginning of the world, Isaiah lxiv. 4.) 1 Cor. ii. 9, no, not into the heart of Adam himself.

GOD'S MIGHTY POWER OVER MAN'S WILL.

That the will of man should be raised up to aim at God's glory in all that he doeth, and to make God the chiefest good, it must be that an almighty power put this principle into a man's heart, a higher power than simply was in the first creation, to do it as believers are enabled to do it. You may know the great power that goeth to work this from the excellency of it, for the more excellent a thing is in being, certainly the more power goeth to work it. This excelleth all beings, raiseth a man above all beings, for it raiseth a man up to live the life of God. A

man liveth the life of beasts when he liveth in pleasures; of a man, when he liveth in honour and in things the reason is capable of; but all this while he is a stranger to the life of God. But to add to the life of a beast the life of reason, and to the life of reason the life of God, there must be an exceeding greatness of power to do this.

THE POWER OF GOD IN INFERIOR WORKS OF GRACE.

There is a different proportion of power requisite to the producing of inferior works of the Spirit of God, and that effectual saving work which puts men into a state of grace. Heb. vi. 4—6. Here is a work of the Spirit, for they are “partakers of the Holy Ghost,” and how else do these men, when they fall away, sin against the Holy Ghost? It is a work above nature, for it is “a tasting of the heavenly gift.” It is a work of power, for they “taste of the power of the world to come,” and the things of another world, which they are enlightened to apprehend, which have a powerful impression upon their hearts.

There is a striving strength that the Holy Ghost putteth forth upon the hearts of men, and an overcoming strength. There is a striving strength, as in Gen. vi. 3. There is an overcoming strength, as in 1 John iv. 3. “He that believeth overcometh the world, for greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.” Corrupt nature will be corrupt nature still, will be flesh still, unless he put forth an almighty power beyond striving, to change it. In these strivings of the Spirit, there is not a taking away of corruption, there is but a restraining of it, the heart remaineth the same.

In 2 Pet. ii. 20. he speaks of men that have been enlightened and wrought upon by the knowledge of

Christ. This place is alleged for falling away from grace, whereas the work, "the escaping the pollutions of the world," did not rise up to true grace. Here is a work upon men's hearts which makes them escape; but what? the pollutions of the world, *μιασματα*, the gross defilements of men's lives, through the knowledge of Christ, without changing their nature; they are swine still, though they do not wallow in the mire. But compare this with ch. i. 4, where he speaks of another work, of a power which giveth us all things that pertain to life and godliness; he telleth us, "We are also partakers of the divine nature." And he doth not say only "They escape the gross defilements of the world," but they "have escaped the corruption, *τῆς φθορᾶς*, that is in the world." There is a change of inward disposition, the stamping of a new nature: this is a divine power.

You shall find, Eph. iii. 16, that there is not only a strength put to the inner man, but there is an inner man which God createth, and then to strengthen it indeed is something: but for the Holy Ghost to insinuate himself into the spirits, and act them, and raise them up to do things above nature, is no such great power: an angel can do it. But to make a "workmanship created unto good works," to put a new principle of life and grace into a man, and then to enable him to act that grace; here lieth the work that beareth proportion with the exceeding greatness of his power.

There is a work upon the understanding of a man, that he shall be enlightened about spiritual things, Heb. vi. 4, and yet not have a work of grace that answereth to the exceeding greatness of God's power to work it. To work upon the understanding is not a work of an almighty power. If a man have never so much knowledge wrought in him by the Holy Ghost in a way of enlightening, if he come to

turn to God, he findeth all that knowledge new. It is called the light of life. Take the poorest soul, that hath but the understanding of Jesus Christ given unto him by the Spirit of God, he hath that knowledge which all the learned men in the world have not. It is the work of an almighty power by creation.

Go, take any man that hath never so high a work, where only the principles of nature have been wrought upon and improved, wound up to the highest ; if God turn this man truly to himself, there needeth as much power yet to do it, as to create a world—as to raise up Christ from the dead.

Look over all the scriptures, where you find inferior workings, which men fall from, and seeming to have been converted fall away ; you shall find in all such scriptures, that those men are still unregenerate, they are but flesh. While self-love is the predominant principle, though a man go never so far in supernatural actions he is but flesh still.

There is a twofold goodness in the things revealed in the word ; there is a proper goodness, and there is an accidental goodness. Now take the instance of Christ. There are his proper excellences, as he is holy, as he is righteous, as he is the Son of God, for which God loveth him ; all these glories are proper to his person. Now to have an eye to see them, and to have the heart taken with them, this is to be a spiritual man ; here is a new principle. Then there is an accidental goodness cometh by Christ ; the word revealeth deliverance from wrath, the way of happiness, and the bread of life. Now the heart that is carnal, that loveth self only, may be taken with that goodness that is from Christ, but never with the goodness that is in Christ. If thou hast a heart suited to the spiritual things revealed in the word, and thou findest thy heart taken with them ; it is certain thou art not flesh, but spirit.

Would you try your hearts then? Observe what considerations they are that set your affections towards spiritual things, and set your will to work. If they be spiritual considerations of the excellences of the things themselves revealed in the word, which you see and find a suitableness in your souls to them: it is certain thou art a spiritual man, thou art more than flesh, this is not working upon the principles in nature; for the "natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit, for they are spiritually discerned." If thou seest them spiritually, and art affected with them as such, certainly thou art spiritual.

If any be yet troubled and say, I find nothing in me but merely these natural principles stirring in me. If thou dost not, let me but gain this of thee first. Though thou findest no more, yet thou mayest have more. For when God beginneth to work first upon any man, there is nothing but self-love in him, and all the motives used in scripture to seize upon a man's self are suited to him. But when he showeth self-love thus in thee, he putteth in thee love to himself secretly, which will stir thee though thou perceive it not. A great deal in a man's heart at first is but a temporary work. The love of God, which is the foundation of all, at the first may not be discerned. Secondly: Let me give this counsel to thee: Thou seest the defects of thine own heart fall short of any true work: make this use of it; stand not examining thy heart, and poring upon it endlessly: but let all these drive thee to Christ, and thou shalt find that faith in him will cut the knot. Go to Christ for the supply of all the things thou wantest: and while thou dost thus live by faith, thou wilt find in the end the comfort of all thy graces come in before thou art aware of it. Thirdly; In that God hath begun thus to work upon thee, it may help thy faith thus to go to Christ, (not as a thing to rest upon, but

thus far) that it is more probable he will own thee and receive thee to mercy than another. Why? Because he hath begun to work upon thee, whether it be a true work or no: I dare not say it is not, neither oughtest thou, till the Holy Ghost reveal the contrary. Go to Christ, and labour to get all things agreed on; for this is the misery of it, when men hear of these things, they are tossed up and down "like a wild bull in a net," and know not how to disentangle themselves. Go to Jesus Christ to help thee to do it. Consider this, that it is more probable God may be merciful to thee than to others; not for any good in thee, that is not my meaning, but because he hath begun to work in thee, which he hath not done in another: and work it out by faith, for you must live by that and die by that, and by that your comfort must come in: and when you have renewed acts of faith, the Holy Ghost will come, and renew the evidences of your graces to you before you are aware.

THE USE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE POWER
OF GOD.

This knowledge serveth to strengthen your faith for the future; that from the experience of that power you have found already in your hearts, you might gather and collect what a mighty power was engaged, and would continue still to work in grace. You are not to look what your own weaknesses are, but what the power of God is in bringing you to salvation; as in the point of mercy you are not to look what your lines are, but what the grace of God in Christ is. As Abraham considered not his own weakness of body, but the power of God: so should you consider, not your own sins, not your own doctrines, these will all argue to you that you will fall short at last; but consider the power that works in you, to

strengthen your hearts for the future. You should to that end endeavour and pray, to know what is the power that works in you, that you may have dependance continually on that power. It is he that works all you do. Your will beareth not one part and his power another; but it is he that works in you both the will and the deed. Phil. ii. 13. God doth not only work WITH the will, but by the will.

A regenerate man hath a capacity in him which a wicked man hath not, for he is a charcoal that hath been in the fire already, therefore he is capable to take fire sooner, he hath habitual grace more fitted to be stirred up, but yet the coal is a dead coal of itself: so that a new life to every action must be put into you.

FAITH MUST BE GROUNDED ON THE POWER AS WELL
AS THE WILL OF GOD.

There are two things mainly which are the object of mere faith, both put together draw men to believe. The one is the power of God, the other is his good will. Now men do stick as much at the belief of the power of God in working, as at his good will to work. Therefore the apostle prayeth that they may have eyes enlightened to know the exceeding greatness of his power. Abraham's faith is described by trusting in the power of God. Rom. iv. 21. "He was strong in faith, being fully persuaded that what God had promised he was able to perform." A sinner, that hath lived long in doubt whether God would own him or no, sticks only at this: I know God is able to save me, but I do not know whether he will or no. It is of an equal difficulty to believe the power of God to save as the mercy of God: and therefore when a soul findeth himself pardoned, what doth he use to say! Is it possible that such a one as I should have mercy? "Let

the power of my Lord be great," said Moses, Num. xiv. 17, "to forgive the iniquity and transgression of this people."

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us."

In Eph. ii. 1—3, the apostle first presented to the church a map of its sin and misery, to prepare it to welcome the grace and mercy which provided a remedy for all this wretchedness. v. 4. "But God who is rich in mercy: for the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins." He intermingleth the sense of their sinfulness, in the midst of his discourse of God's graciousness and mercy, that they may be sure to have deep thoughts of their wretchedness, to affect their hearts with his goodness.

He ushers in this turn in his discourse with an expression of admiration at a grace so opposite to, and beyond what we could think. "But God"—It is God alone that doth all in the matter of salvation, and he doth it by love, which is a desire to communicate good unto the creature, and mercy pulling him out of a depth of misery. Mercy hath respect to the misery of its object, it is this which will cause a king to pardon a traitor; but if he shall take this traitor and advance him to the highest dignity, and make him sit together with him on the throne as it were, this must needs be from a munificence of love, transcending what mercy would dictate in the profession of its kindness.

The love of God laid the foundation of all good, and it is the highest thing to be attained to, and to be pursued after by us. Of all things in God, value his love, it is more than all his gifts, and yet he has given great things to us, and done great things for us. His love is the first gift, in which all things else are

yours. The gift of his Son was founded in his love : " He so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." Self love and misery will make thee seek after mercy, but it is grace which must carry thee on to look for the love of God, and the favour of God, and which renders that your chief object.

There is a love in God to us, even when we are sinners in our natural estate, and it was the manifestation of that love that he gave Christ to die. Rom. v. 8, " God hereby commendeth his love towards us, that whilst we were sinners Christ died for us." A father, whilst his child proceeds in a course of evil, can in his wisdom proceed no otherwise with him but in wrath ; yet all that while may so love him, as to set all ways on work to bring him in. Did not David deal so with Absalom, 2 Sam. xiii. ? And if you ask again, how can we be children of wrath and yet God love us ? I ask again, How was Jesus Christ a curse, when he hung upon the cross, and yet at the same time to be loved with the greatest love ? Furthermore, God's love was from everlasting, it existed before our misery, and was manifested towards us in triumphing over that our condition.

We must see a goodness in the creature that we love, to draw out our love from us ; but all the love that is in him, he hath it in his own power, to set it where he would. Exod. xxxiii. 19. " I will be gracious unto whom I will be gracious ;" and to whomsoever this graciousness extends they shall experience all his goodness. For whomsoever God hath pitched this love upon, all the fulness that is in God is coming upon that soul, as we learn from Eph. iii. 18., where the apostle prays that " they may be able to comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height ; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, and be filled with all the fulness of God."

God hath so set forth this attribute of love to us as

that which is predominant over every other of his attributes, that he takes more unkindly the slighting of his love, than the despising of his wisdom or his power.

God that is infinite hath an infinite love in his heart to bestow : his name is love and none loves in comparison of him. He hath taken all means to manifest this love to us by its effects, first in the giving of his Son, then in the giving of his Spirit, and then grace and glory. There is a succession in his benefits : but the love whence these flow was complete and without variation from the beginning, the very first glance of love that God had towards us, was so intense that all which he hath since done has been but means which his wisdom hath invented to exhibit that love. It was this which made the rich provision for Adam's wants : it was this that fastened Christ to the cross, no other nails but those of love held him there, and an eternity shall be occupied in the reiterated display of that everlasting love. In Psalm xl. 5, the Psalmist (and it is Christ that speaks that psalm, who knew the love of his Father, and knew his heart), saith, " How many are thy thoughts towards us, O God ! " They are indeed renewed every moment, and cannot be numbered ; as he loved us from the beginning so he loveth us unto the end.

The purpose of God is in Mal. iii. 6 ; 2 Tim. ii. 19, and other passages, laid as the foundation of the immutability and continuance of his love.

Were it grounded upon our works, or our qualities, it might be removed from us, but it is an invincible love which shall overcome all difficulties, and overrule all that tends the contrary way. Rom. viii. 35—37. " Who shall separate us from the love of God." The word implies a separation like the rending of the soul from the body. There is a union between Christ and us, and there is also a union between God and

us ; and he loveth us with the same love wherewith he loved his Son, and in this there can be no separation.

The loving nature of God is seen in this, that his acts of mercy are spoken of in scripture as those wherein he delights whilst his acts of punishment and justice are declared to be his unwilling and his strange acts. Lam. iii. 33 ; Isaiah xxviii. 21. But when he comes to show mercy, he rejoices over them to do them good with his whole heart, and with his whole soul. Jer. xxxii. 41. It is his disposition to be the Father of mercies, 2 Cor. i. 3, as David remarks, 1 Chron. xvii. 19, " According to thine own heart, hast thou done all this greatness," that is, thou hast shown mercy, like thyself, the great God delighting in mercy.

It is also the excellency by which God is pleased to set forth his glory, that he is *rich* in mercy. It is the peculiar treasure of this King of kings, in which he is eminent. We read not in all the scriptures, that God is said to be rich in wrath, or rich in justice, or rich in power, though these perfections belong to him ; but when he would make known to us the riches of his glory, he speaks of the profuseness of his goodness and mercy unto all that call upon him.

God is the father of a variety of mercies, and there is no sin or misery, but God hath a mercy for it. He hath found out a Remedy for sin, the hardest thing of all to cure, and therefore he hath provided a remedy for all other misery. And as there are many which the creature is subject to, so he hath a treasury of all sorts of mercies, divided into several promises in the scripture, which are but as so many caskets of variety of mercies. If thy heart be hard, his mercies are tender ; if thy heart be dead, he hath mercy to quicken it ; if thou be sick, he hath mercy to heal thee ; if thou be sinful, he hath mercies

to sanctify and cleanse thee ; as large and various as are our wants, so large and various are his mercies. So as we may come boldly to find grace and mercy to help in time of need. These mercies are more than have been explored and enumerated. They are hidden riches, and Moses, after concluding the blessings which God would bestow upon the Israelites for their obedience, adds, " the Lord shall open to thee his good treasure," as if he had mentioned but a few instances, and not told them the half of God's mercies.

The Psalmist, when he speaks of God's judgments as a great deep, means not those of wrath and judgment, but the works of his providence, for he adds, " Thou preservest man and beast," (Psalm xxxvi. 6,) and in the same respect the apostle (Rom. xi. 33,) breaks forth into admiration of the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. And if these common mercies of God that are exercised towards all are so unsearchable, " how excellent," as we find in the conclusion of the same 36th Psalm, " is thy loving kindness, O Lord, to the sons of men that trust in thee ! " What must be that royal bounty which he hath reserved for those whom he hath prepared as vessels of mercy to receive these abundant treasures.

It is another character of great riches, that they are inexhaustible. Such is the mercy of God, it hath no end : he can forgive great sins, and continue to do it, " forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin," is his description, (Exod. xxxiv. 7,) ; and so in Micah vii. 18, " Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage." In Matt. xviii. 24 and 27, speaking there in the parable of forgiveness, he saith, he forgave ten thousand talents, which one that was brought unto him owed him ; and this speaking of the common forgiveness of a temporary

ver too. Ten thousand talents is a mighty sum. ziah, in 2 Chron. xxv. 6, hired an hundred sand mighty men of valour, for an hundred ts; what would a thousand talents do then? would ten thousand talents do? All this is to ess the great riches of his mercy in forgiving. n thou wast first turned unto God, what a world n didst thou bring with thee! ten thousand ts! He forgave them all when he first quick-thee, when he first converted thee, and he doth nue, and will continue to do so too. "His com-ons" are said "to fail not," in Lam. iii. 22, hat because they are "renewed every morning." are mercies "from everlasting," and they will nue "unto everlasting;" it is a treasure that never be spent, never be exhausted, unto ity. "In thy mercy is continuance." (Isaiah 5.) We have in this storehouse, "much goods up for many years," as riches that can serve not only, but all the world, all who call upon him, uch as they shall for ever spend, or stand in of. It is a mercy that will stretch to thousands nerations of them that love him, the sure and nited mercies of David, which shall extend not to the term of man's life on earth, but into ity; for "thy mercies, O Lord, are in the ens." (Psalm xxxvi. 5.)

"That in the ages to come, he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us in Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith."

The apostle shows by what degrees God doth proceed to bring salvation to its accomplished perfection. He begins with souls dead in sins, he quickeneth them; and he hath besides that done this for us, in Christ he hath raised up our souls and bodies, and hath set us in heavenly places in him. The first we receive in our own persons together with Christ here below. As to the other two, they are indeed received for us by Christ, and in Christ they are made sure to us, but yet they are not accomplished and made perfect. Now in the words above, he comes to that which was God's end, and indeed the utmost accomplishment of all that he had done, the crown of all the former.

God in showing forth so much grace on Jews and Gentiles, in converting them and in doing so much for them, aimed to hold them forth as patterns to all ages to come, who may expect the like grace, and that he will dispense the like grace to the end of the world.

After God hath thus gone on in manifesting his free grace under the gospel, in quickening and gathering his elect together; when the time comes, that they shall sit not only in Christ as now, but with Christ in heavenly places; then as the close of all, he will manifest and show forth an unknown treasure, that shall be answerable to the mercy and grace that is in the great God, and answerable to the dignity of being conformed unto Jesus Christ, and made like him. Then begins another world in ages to come, in which he will break open the riches of his grace, in the utmost accomplishment of our salvation, and when he will show so much glory as to hold propor-

tion with the exceeding riches of the great God, and of his loving-kindness.

God's utmost end in man's salvation is the showing forth of what is in himself, and the making of it known, that it may be glorified. And because it is the manifestation of the riches of his grace, it argues also, that his end of manifesting himself was not wholly for himself, but to communicate unto others. Grace is wholly communicative, and there can be no other interpretation of "showing riches of grace," but "to do good to others." If he had said that the supreme end had been the manifestation of his power and wisdom, it might have imported something he would have gotten from the creature, not by communicating any thing unto them, but by manifesting these upon them; he could have shown his power and wisdom upon them, and yet have communicated no blessedness to them.

This should be the great strengthener and upholder of our faith, that God hath done and will do such things for sinners, because the supreme end of saving us is, the glorifying of the riches of his own grace. The apostle introduces it on purpose to take off the wonder of unbelief, after he had told this strange story of God's love, and man's salvation; and to strengthen our faith, "that by grace we are saved." If God had told us how much he had done to us, out of love to us merely or chiefly, the truth is, we could never have believed it, when once humbled; for we never could have seen that proportion between us and God in any respect, that should have moved him to have saved us, and to have pardoned us so much as he hath done. But when he tells us, that the utmost thing that moved him, was the manifesting the riches of his own grace; and that he accounteth the riches of his grace his chiefest riches, and that the greatest glory he affects is to be gracious; this lets a man see so far into God's heart, as that the soul

resteth satisfied, sees a reason why God may save sinners, such a reason as the heart must needs rest and acquiesce in. And the truth is, there is no other doctrine will satisfy the guilty heart of a sinner in the point of salvation—but only this. This takes off all objections; and the stronger the objections are, it gives a man the more hope; he is the apter to believe, when once faith begins by the beams of the Spirit to enlighten him. Why? Because all objections become but matter for God's free grace, to show forth more riches of grace upon him. "For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off. For mine own sake, even for mine own sake will I do it." Isa. xlviii. 9, 11. God speaks thus not only that his own glory should be advanced, but that our hearts should be settled and satisfied, and see reason why we should be saved, in that God's own end, and the highest end he could have, runs along with our salvation.

"The exceeding riches of grace."

There are in God exceeding riches of liberality, seen both in forgiving and also in giving. "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy." Mic. vii. 18. I will not insist upon the riches of his grace in forgiving, for that belongs more properly to mercy. He is as rich, and exceeding rich in giving. "Trust in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." 1 Tim. vi. 17. It is said, in Isaiah xxxii. 8, that "the liberal man deviseth liberal things;" he consults with his power and with his riches what he is able to do, and what he is able to bestow. But when the great God deviseth liberal things, what great things will then

be given! "According to thine own heart hast thou done all this greatness, in making known all these great things." 1 Chron. xvii. 19. David speaks of the mercies which God vouchsafed to him: "O Lord, for thy servant's sake," or, as the Septuagint reads it, "for thy word's sake," namely Christ, "and according to thine own heart." When God means to give, and to show forth his grace in giving, he consults with his Christ and with his own heart; and when he gives, he gives like the great God: "O Lord, there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee." When infinite wisdom, able to invent and devise what is best, and to study liberal things, shall unite with a power answerable; and both these shall be set in a heart full of all largeness, full of all bounty and generosity, that resolves to be gracious to the utmost of his wisdom and power; what may you expect? "He will give grace and glory, no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly," Psalm lxxxiv. 11. God surely knows all good things and the height of all blessedness; and he plainly tells us, that he will not withhold any good thing; he hath a heart to bestow whatsoever is good, to bestow all the good he can think of.

The excellency of grace is also shown in that he giveth freely. The freeness of grace is the riches of grace. The fewer motives there are to move him, the more eminent his grace in respect to freeness. All that he doeth for his children is but "the fulfilling of the good pleasure of his goodness." Mercy and love may have something to move them in what is loved or pitied. But grace always imports such a freedom as is moved with nothing, but is merely out of the good pleasure of goodness; that is properly grace. For mercy will move to pity, and some good in the creature may move to love; but to be moved to be gracious, and to show riches of grace, that imports merely the good pleasure of his own will.

That God should be moved to punish men, as he hath motives within himself, anger, wrath, justice, and hatred of sin ; so he hath external motives in the creature to stir them up. But for his grace, there is nothing but what is solely in himself, upon which grace doth terminate itself. Hatred in him hath sin in us ; but grace hath nothing in the creature, but merely that it is capable of God's favour, and of being loved. And there is not only no worthiness, but nothing but unworthiness. Mercy respects misery properly ; but it is grace only that respects stiff-neckedness and obstinacy, Deut. ix. 6. For what will mercy say ? I pity one in misery, but as for this man he is wilfully miserable, and the fault lies in himself. But grace comes with sovereignty, and saith, Though he be stiff-necked, and though he be obstinate, yet " I have seen his ways and I will heal him." Isaiah lvii. 18.

And this favour is more than all he giveth or forgiveth, that he is pleased over and above all, to become a father, a husband, and a brother, and infinitely more transcendently than these relations are found among men. This is riches of grace indeed. When Saul had advanced David to be his son-in-law, to have that near relation to him, David accounted it more than all the rest of the favours shown him. Now we have fellowship and communion with God under all relations whatsoever. " Our fellowship," saith the apostle, " is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ," 1 John i. 3. And therefore saith he, chap. iii. 1. " Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God ; " to have so near a relation to him. This is exceeding riches of grace : this is more than heaven itself. The grace of God is so eminent and super-excellent, that it contents not itself in giving and in forgiving ; in entering into all these relations ; and to do all these freely too ; but it will

be at a cost, at an extraordinary cost, to purchase all that which it means to give, and which it might give without that purchase. This is a strain, and the highest strain that can be thought of; merely because he would show forth super-eminent and super-excellent grace. When Araunah did offer unto David oxen and sheep to sacrifice, in 2 Sam. xxiv. 24, saith David, "Nay, but I will surely buy it of thee at a price, neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing." He spake this because he knew that would be more accepted by God to make it a free-will offering, not to offer that which was given him, but what he must pay for. So it is with God: saith God with himself, "I could have saved these men, and have brought them to heaven; I could have entered into all these relations; I could have given them my Son to become a Redeemer and a Head for them, and so I might have become their Father; I could have given them my Spirit, and have given them grace and glory: I could have done all this immediately, and without any cost. No, saith he, I will be at a price: I will not show favour unto these men out of that which shall cost me nothing." He would needs give his Son to death, to purchase all that which grace could have bestowed, and bestowed without the death of his Son. And this he did, merely that he might show forth the more grace. Why? Because it is his own proper cost and charges he doth it at. And he triumpheth more that the grace he bestoweth cost him thus much.

Lastly.—Here is "in Christ Jesus" added. For all God's kindness, and all his grace towards us, it is in Christ. It is an infinite magnifying of the Lord Jesus, that he alone being in heaven, is able enough, and worthy enough, to take into his possession all the glory, and all the grace, that ever God means to bestow upon his children. Had not he been a person

answerably glorious, we could not have been said to "sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus," or, that the riches of his grace should be shewn in his kindness towards us in him. But so great a person is Jesus Christ, God and Man, that as the sun, if there were ten thousand stars more to be created, and the heavens to be filled with them all, there is light enough in the sun to enlighten them all; so there is in Christ. And therefore, my brethren, never think to set up without this Lord Jesus Christ. Do not think that he only serves to bring you unto God, and there leave you: no, he will never leave you to eternity. All the kindness that God shews you to eternity, it is in Christ Jesus.

Another meditation which ariseth from the interpretation of these words is this, you see the apostle makes these Ephesians, and other primitive Christians, to be patterns to all ages to come, How comfortable is it to see how God hath fulfilled this promise. I confess this, that the reading of the writings of the men in all ages, hath always filled my heart with this comfort, that not only I see that God in all ages hath kept the fundamentals of Christianity that should save men, but that in all ages he hath still had a handful who have professed his truth, and held forth his name, and have cleaved to the doctrine of free grace. We see, my brethren, how this promise hath been fulfilled; and in our age we see how the virtue of this very promise and prophecy, which the apostle here gives, in the preaching of the gospel, and shining forth thereof from under the darkness of Popery, which had mingled with the grace of God, abundance of corruption, even well nigh to the overthrowing of it; I mean so to overthrow it as men should not have been saved, but that God did preserve so much truth as might save them, even under those corrupt opinions, whilst not held against light. We, that

live now so many years after Christ, see this very promise and prophecy here fulfilled. God engaged himself that in the ages to come, the riches of free grace should be laid open; and, lo! he hath performed it. And to our comfort we see wherein the main of reformation lies; it lies in opening the doctrine of the substantials of salvation; concerning the estate of man by nature; the work of conversion; and the privileges we have in Christ. It lies in clearing the doctrine of free grace and the way of faith, which lays hold upon it, "by grace ye are saved through faith;" as it follows afterwards. We see the truth of this prophecy riseth up more and more to view, in the latter ages of the world, and we enjoy the fruit of it more clearly and fully than our fathers did: and God will never leave till he has brought his saints and children to that first pattern, to that doctrine of grace, in the purity and perfection of it, which was then taught.

Again: what is it that God will expend upon us in heaven? He will expend upon us the "exceeding riches of his grace." The exceeding riches of God's grace must be laid out in something proportionable to it. If a king should say, 'Go, take all the riches in my kingdom, and expend it upon such an entertainment;' if the maker of the entertainment be faithful and wise, the entertainment shall be suitable to those exceeding riches that have been expended upon it. If we say that such and such a thing doth cost a man so much, we reckon it folly in him, that is the purchaser or procurer of it, at such a rate, if it do not hold some proportion to the cost. Now, then, if God will shew forth the exceeding riches of his grace, that happiness and glory that must hold a proportion to this, and come up to it, and be worthy of it—that entertainment which God himself is the maker of—and therefore he will not cast away *any of his grace*, but his saints shall have

it out in glory—how great must that glory be! And it is his purpose to shew forth that glory. Saith God, I will shew you how great a God I am; how gracious I am: how well I can love creatures, and how kind he will be when he meaneth to be kind. If Ahasuerus, being a great king, will make a feast to shew the riches of his glorious kingdom, how great, how magnificent, shall the feast be! If God will make creatures happy, and undertakes to do it, to show forth the exceeding riches of his grace, and this before all ages, all men, when all the world is gathered together, how great must this glory be! And I beseech you consider who are the stewards of all these riches that are in God? Here are grace and loving kindness; we are, therefore, like to be well entertained. You see grace is at all the cost, and gives commission to loving kindness to spare for nothing. If it be to shew forth the riches of grace, grace will be sure to provide for its own glory, to shew itself to the utmost. And when kindness towards us shall have grace's purse at command, that will be sure to think nothing too good for us. If a prince should employ one to make entertainment, that is of a profuse and prodigal spirit, and a deep observer and favourer of the persons to be entertained; he will be sure to lay on cost enough; especially if the prince set open his coffers, and bid him take out whatever he will for that entertainment; what an entertainment do you expect shall be made by that man! Saith God to loving-kindness, here is all my riches, take whatever you please. And, my brethren, surely that is profuse enough!

**THE MERCIES IN GOD'S NATURE,
THE OBJECT, AND SUPPORT,
AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF FAITH.**

PSALM CXXX. 7.

*Let Israel hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is
mercy ; and with him is plenteous redemption."*

THE work of faith whereby a sinner's heart is won, then strengthened and supported to trust and stay self on God for its eternal salvation, is, in general experience, found to be a matter of greatest difficulty, exercise and conflict.

There is, therefore, need of all sorts of encouragement that can possibly be raised out of the Holy scriptures, which may either serve to bring humbled and broken hearts and God together at first, or afterwards to hearten them to hold fast the beginning of that confidence, steadfast and firm unto the end ; and all little enough. Such and so great are the discouragements, which unbelief within us doth foment, and which Satan doth undiscernibly cast in.

Now above all other inducements and supporters

unto faith, the consideration of the mercies in God's heart and nature is the strongest, the most winning and obliging. Unto thoroughly humbled and broken hearts it is I write this. It is for others who are never heavy laden with sin, as sin sits light on their hearts, so they set as light by the mercies of God, and a confused slight apprehension that God is merciful, serves their turn, and is a salve sufficient to their sore. This is but proportionable unto that confused apprehension of their sinfulness, which in this manner they use to wrap up that we are all sinners. But take a soul that hath been unhinged from the opinion of his being in a good estate, (which is natural to us, and our souls do turn themselves upon) and who also is made thoroughly sensible of the abounding sinfulness of sin as sin, and then taken in the dismal prospect of the heinous guilt of his bold presumptions, and crying rebellions against God's knowledge, and hath been amazed with the numberless accounts of the variety of sinnings, which he is to give account of unto God the judge of all, and hath been struck with the dreadfulfulness of that which is due thereunto. Unto such a soul, and with the apprehension of these things, the most enlarged discoveries that can be made of the riches of the mercies that are in God, and of the fulness of the merit that is in Christ's righteousness and redemption, do all prove little enough effective, either to beget a sound and saving faith, or when some beginnings of that are raised, to keep it up, nourish, and sustain it, in a comfortable rest and confidence unto the end.

The truth of these things we may perceive by the pulse of his heart who penned the 130th Psalm that he sunk into the greatest depths, (which depths were to be his sins both in the multitude and heinousness of them) in this conflict his faith hath recourse to this truth, from the word of God, which he comm

as the main prop and support to all the Israel of God. "With the Lord there is mercy, and with him there is plenteous redemption, verse 7; and again, "With the Lord there is forgiveness," verse 4, as the fruit both of mercy and redemption; and therefore it is "my soul doth wait for the Lord." His affiance is upon what was with God and in God. Whether these mercies were as yet *his* own in particular or no, he speaks not that, nor whether God (as when established in assurance he elsewhere speaks) were the God of *his* mercies. Psalm lix. 10: but only utters this for the present, that mercy was with God and in God, there it was to be had for such sinners as he was, and for the Israel of God, and therefore he personally puts in for a share in them, that was all his hope.

Mercy is with God, it is his name, it is his nature; and in this sense it is said to be with him; it is also in the purposes and resolutions of his will, yea, it is the delight of his soul.

Redemption is with God, as his treasures are said to be with him or by him. Christ's redemption and righteousness was then with him in the virtue of Christ's bond of covenant given to God to perform it; and as truly with God then, as since Christ hath actually paid it. Thus in Job xxxiii. 24. God saith of an humbled sinner, "deliver him, I have found a ransom."

Forgiveness is also with God, laid up ready by him on purpose to be had from him. His mercies lie ready in his promises, to be given forth to every one that will come in for grace, and take them in all their plenteous abundance.

THE GROUND OF FAITH IN THE MERCIES OF GOD.

Now this knowledge of the mercies of God's nature is not alone an adequate ground of faith, when God, as in the case of devils, hath excepted any from pardon; nor would it simply of itself have been a full ground of actual positive faith for us sinners of the sons of men, had not God declared his purpose of mercy towards us in his Messiah. Our first parents between the fall and God's declaration of his good will to men in the promise of the blessed seed of the woman, were in a doleful suspense, having nothing for faith to set foot upon. In that condition nothing in sight did appear, but an overflowing deluge of wrath on them and their posterity.

But now that God hath manifested himself to be a God that exerciseth loving kindness, righteousness, and judgment in the earth, and that therein he doth delight, Jer. ix. 24, a wide door of hope and faith stands open for any one to come in at, and the most ample prospect of those mercies which we can attain to, doth wonderfully strengthen a broken-hearted sinner, to lay hold upon a particular promise, especially of forgiveness, and an extensive contemplation of them in our thoughts will have answerable effects in an enlargement and increase of faith in us.

The words proclaimed in Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty: visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation;" these very words were ever after made use of as the

common refuge and asylum of the faith of the saints of the Old Testament, to which they had recourse for their support in point of forgiveness, and upon other occasions, in which they stood in need of mercy.

God himself was the proclaimer of this foundation of our faith. He published it not through a herald, but "the Lord passed by before Moses and proclaimed this." That he should show mercy unto sinners hath the greatest condescension in it, but much more to come down and proclaim it. For the great God to shut up the emblazoning of his incomprehensible nature into the narrow compass of a few words and form of speech, portraying forth himself by an imperfect delineation to bring himself down to our capacities, this was a farther condescending indeed, and a most certain pledge given, that the Jehovah, God blessed for ever, would rend the heavens, and come down and take our nature, and dwell among us, and put this proclamation into full force and efficacy.

There are two grand pillars of faith in the Old Testament; one, God's promise of Christ; the other, this manifesto of God's gracious nature. And God took advantage for both, upon the commission of the most heinous sins; the one upon occasion of the first and greatest sin, our first parents' fall, by which all mankind were undone: and now again upon the first greatest sin these people did commit, after their having received the law, and heard God's voice, it was that he published the other. And he pardoned each of these their sins whilst he was uttering these promises. We may well, therefore, hereupon glorifying him, say, as that the Lord is gracious and full of compassion, so in respect to the opportunity God took, that he waiteth to be gracious, that is, to manifest it in the fittest season; for he is a God of judgment. (Isaiah xxx. 18.) What heart guilty

turn every one from his evil way ; saying, who can tell if God will repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not." Micah introduces a part of this proclamation in chap. vii. 18. And Hezekiah, writing to his brethren, the ten tribes, and inviting them to return to God, assuring them that God would pardon and receive them again upon their repentance, persuades them of it by God's own words. (2 Chron. xxx. 9.) Lastly, good Nehemiah, almost a thousand years after Moses, doth make mention of these words, (ch. ix. 17,) "Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not."

THE IMPORT OF THE NAME JEHOVAH.

Jehovah is, of all other names placed here, designedly as the seal and subject of the attributes that follow. It was first given and revealed as a token and signal of grace and mercy, as is evident from Exod. iii. 7—15 ; vi. 1—7. God, in this declaration, puts over the whole of that covenant, and the mercies thereof, and his purposes therein, unto the import and memorial of his name Jehovah ; and, at the close of all, (v. 8,) as one useth to do his name and seal unto a covenant and deed for performance, so he subscribes unto all, I am Jehovah.

In the New Testament, this his name Jehovah is expressly assigned as the whole of his grace, as the spring likewise of peace. Grace and peace had often been wished, in other epistles of the New Testament, from God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, &c. ; but in Rev. i. 4, grace and peace is prayed for from him who *is*, and which *was*, and which *is to come* ; which is in words at length, the unciphering of the same name Jehovah. From God

as Jehovah is the whole of gospel grace at once wished and prayed for, this name being the ground and original of the gospel itself, and of all the mercies of it.

And ere we go any farther, let us stand and wonder at the thought, that this name of all other names, this "great and terrible name," by which he chooseth "to be exalted," Psalm lxxviii. 4; this "great name," Jer. xlv. 26, which is so "terrible" and so "holy," Psalm xcix. 3; that name so terrible to the Jews for so many hundreds of years, that they have not dared to pronounce it, and is called his "dreadful name," among the heathens, Mal. i. 14, that this should be made the basis, the subject, the signal of so much grace. This must needs afford us strong consolation; since God accounts mercy to be his greatest attribute, as Jehovah his greatest name.

JEHOVAH JOINED WITH MERCIFUL AND GRACIOUS.

This great name wholly and abstractedly speaks BEING itself: I am Jehovah, that is, I have fulness of being. That then God should put Jehovah, and merciful, and gracious together, what would he have us to understand thereby, but that his mercies have being itself for their root and foundation; not only that mercies are with him, but that they have a very being itself to rely upon, put under our faith as a firm rock of being to stand upon. "Trust in the Lord for ever, for in Jah Jehovah is the rock of ages." Isa. xxvi. 4. Whom we may therefore perfectly trust on, as in the case before, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee," to which answers that of the apostle, 1 Peter i. 13, "Trust perfectly on the grace to be revealed."

Jehovah imports that God only is, or alone hath true being. So that it must be said, that God alone

is merciful and gracious, as truly as Christ says, that God alone is good, for mercy is but a branch of goodness. That passage in Psalm lxxxvi. 10, "Thou art God alone," will be found eminently to be spoken of as a magnifying of him in relation to his mercy, if v. 5 and 15 be compared with it: so as we may say, he is merciful alone. If sins come to be pardoned, God's mercies solely and alone can stand us in any stead, not only because that God alone can pardon sins committed against himself: but besides for this, that he alone hath mercy great enough in him to do it. The creatures have not mercy sufficient in them: great sins they would not find in their hearts to pardon; so great an iniquity, if to themselves, as sin is against God, they cannot forgive: "Who is a God like unto thee, pardoning iniquity and sin?" If any creature had all the goodness and clemency, mercy and grace, that is diffused throughout the whole of intelligent nature, angels and men, it were not to be relied on.

Jehovah imports that his being is of himself, and so his showing mercy is from himself, having no motive but from what is in himself, either as to the persons to whom, or as to the things or mercies bestowed. For although to be merciful is his nature, yet the dispensation or giving forth of mercy is from his will; and that which his will is guided by, is the good pleasure of his will. Eph. i. 5.

Jehovah imports God to be the fountain of all Being to all things else that have being. The best and noblest, the highest ranks of beings derive from it their original, holds their dependance entirely upon Jehovah as he is gracious and merciful. There is an order of things in nature, of the first creation continued in existence in common providence. There is an order of things in grace, which are wholly supernatural. Scripture speaks the difference of their productions, when it speaks of some things "not

made with hands, and not of this building." I will instance in the highest of that rank, in the order of grace, and things supernatural, the head of them all, Christ's human nature, in its advancement by personal union with the Son of God: aye, and Christ's body too, as having been conceived by the Holy Ghost. Heb. ix. 11. "Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building." Also the work of grace wrought by a new creation in the heart of a sinner, the image of Christ, is a new creation "made without hands." All things appertaining to this order of grace have the name and nature of being, as truly as those other; "of him (of God) are ye in Christ Jesus," says the apostle. 1 Cor. i. 30: but of him, as Jehovah, gracious and merciful, says the prophet, for the apostle refers us for the proof of this to Jer. ix. 23, 24, "Thus saith Jehovah: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, &c. but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am Jehovah, which exercise loving kindness, and judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith Jehovah."

Righteousness of justification is a work of God upon us, but sanctification is a working holiness in us; and yet each of these have a title of being given to them, "of him ARE ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made" both these to you.

There are many of the greatest blessings or benefits we receive in Christ, that are an external preferring us to a dignity, an high privilege in which the benefit mainly consists, but hath for its concomitant and its consequence the most real effects of any other. And the privilege itself hath a transcendent being in itself, and they are bestowed upon us by way of creation, or God's making or calling as so to be, ac-

according to what is said, Rom. iv. 17, God calls those things that are not, as though they were, and gives them being.

Jehovah merciful is the Father of all the mercies that are in the heart of Christ himself, through whose heart all God's mercies flow to us. Jehovah merciful gave being to them, God commanded him to love us, and put into his head, as man, that love which passeth knowledge. Eph. iii. 19. As God gave him a body, he gave him a heart fitted, Psalm lxxxix. 24; speaking of Christ under the type of David, says he, "my faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him;" to execute all for me, and to dispense all the mercies out of mercifulness in himself, which I myself would dispense. God having given up all into his hand, God's mercies and faithfulness are with him in the execution.

It would be too poor a thing for me now to tell you, that Jehovah merciful gives being to all the mercies in the hearts of fathers, mothers, friends, or whomever you know to be pitiful. And shall not he that made the eye see? And shall not he that put these mercies into all the hearts of all the creatures, yea, into the hearts of them "that are evil," be himself merciful? And shall it be said, How can a mother forget her child? And shall not this, in a more transcendent infinite manner be attributed to God. He is the Father of Christ, and of all the mercies in Christ, and that is beyond all. Remember that he is Jehovah merciful, that gives being to all in which your souls do trust.

The name Jehovah imports him also to be the first and the last in being, and so his giving being to all things from the first unto the last, and that they all wholly and all along depend on him for being, which is in a great part the mind of that speech, Isaiah xlv. 6, "I am the first, and I am the last;" and, ch. xli. 4, "Who hath wrought and done (it),

calling the generations from the beginning? I Jehovah, the first, and with the last, I (am) he." Time was, when there was no creature "with" him, from all eternity, and then he was first only and alone. For time to come, God hath ordained some sort of creatures to exist to eternity, like as he doth, and so in that respect he is said to be "with the last."

This expression, "the first and the last," incloseth and taketh in the whole line and series of benefits of grace and salvation whatsoever, continued all along between that "first and last." He is the author of our faith, and so the first; and the finisher, and so the last. Heb. xii. 2. Then he is at death, too, when we "receive the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls," 1 Pet. i. 9; and at the day of judgment, "The Lord grant he may find mercy at that day." 2 Tim. i. 18. It is then we have need of mercy, and he is the giver of it. And he is Jehovah gracious "with the last," for eternal glory is as much from his grace as conversion itself. It is the "gift of God," Rom. vi. 23, and grace reigns even in heaven to eternity. Rom. v. 21.

This name of God Jehovah, imports also his being from everlasting to everlasting. His mercies are from everlasting; for both Jehovah and merciful are still correspondent: "Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies, and thy loving-kindnesses which have been ever of old." Psalm xxv. 6. They are mercies as to time past; "remember:" they are his special mercies to his elect, "tender mercies:" and they are his loving-kindnesses, which word imports his enticed love, as Psalm xviii. 2. His mercies are to everlasting also, "The Lord is good, his mercy is everlasting, and his truth endureth to all generations." Psalm c. 5.

Trust in him at all times and seasons: for he that was, and is, and is to come, is your Jehovah merciful. The worst times are those when you have sinned

against him, yet come to him with faith at such time. You are not to imagine that indeed when we walk holily, and only then, we may come with expectation of mercy and pardon from him: no, but trust in him at all times; only come humbling yourselves, and turning unto him; draw near to him, and he will draw near to you. God is not as man, to be merciful by fits: but consider, he is merciful as Jehovah, and therefore with constancy and continually. Psalm lxxi. 3. "Bethou my strong habitation whereunto I may continually resort: thou hast given commandment to save me: for thou art my rock and my fortress." v. 14. "But I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more."

The name Jehovah imports also immutability, unchangeableness of being: "I am Jehovah, I change not." Mal. iii. 6. And the apostle says of Christ, "that he is the same to-day, yesterday, and for ever." Heb. xiii. 8. And as God is thus in his being unchangeable, so in his mercies; the mercies of the spiritual David are "sure mercies." The perpetuity of mercy is one eminent part of Psalm lxxxix: for with that he begins: "For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever; thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens;" for these mercies have a sure foundation laid in God's heart, "The Lord knows who are his." And then they are founded on that corner-stone Christ, elect and precious; which having been begun to be laid in the heart once of every one that is regenerate, will never cease to be built up even to eternity. We are apt to think, how little of mercy have I yet had shewn forth upon me! Consider, God hath but begun with thee; he laid in thy heart, at conversion, a small spark and seed of grace; and therewith, as the foundation, the pardon of all thy sins; which, as to all that is to follow, is but as a foundation buried under ground. But mercy hath not done with thee; for in infinite glo-

rious works that follow it is to be built up for ever, continually to be added unto, both in grace and glory.

THE STRENGTH OF GOD.

The repetition of the name of God thrice hath a great mystery in it: Jehovah, Jehovah God (El), and shews that all the three persons incline to be merciful and gracious; God the Father, and God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. And what is this other than what we have, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen." 2 Cor. xiii. 14. The Holy Ghost communicates the love and grace of the Father and Son. Grace, and mercy, and peace, are wished, as from God the Father, and God the Son, so from God the Holy Ghost. Rev. i. 3, 4. He bears the name of El, strong, the strong God. He hath the execution of all the mercy God doth dispense to us, which requires power and strength. Who strengthens thee in all temptations, and upholds thy feeble knees and weak hands? It is the Holy Ghost. And is not that mercy? "That you may be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." Eph. iii. 16.

THE POWER AND MERCY OF GOD.

Our next inquiry is, why strength and greatness, and dreadfulness, are joined with mercy? To exalt mercy the more. Certainly the preface is to that purpose, "Our God, the great, the mighty, and the terrible God, who keepeth covenant and mercy," &c. Neh. ix. 32. It aggrandizes mercy the more, that a God so great, so dreadful, should yet be merciful.

Look, as the unworthiness and sinfulness of us, whom God loves and shews mercy to, commands his love, Rom. v. 8, so the greatness and terribleness of the person that loves, advance and magnify his goodness and mercy, multiplying grace even from Jehovah as he is almighty. This is the difference between God and man: in man, weakness is very much the foundation of mercy; those that are of softer tempers are more merciful: but in God, mercy flows from strength, and power, and greatness; "the Lord God, strong and merciful." God is merciful, not after the manner of men for kind of mercies: "I am God, and not man, therefore you are not consumed." Hosea xi. 9.

God's mercy proceeds from strength, because he is a strong God, able to do all things; because he is almighty, therefore he is merciful. There is a good saying in one of the collects of the Common Prayer Book, 'O God, who declarest thy almighty power most chiefly in shewing mercy and pity; mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace,' &c. wherein it is accounted an high act of omnipotency to forgive sins.

The seat of mercy is the will: "I will be merciful to whom I will be merciful." Exod. xxxiii. 19. What then, is mercy in his will? Not a mere act, but a propensity, an inward inclination from out of his goodness of will to shew mercy to them that are in misery: "Thou, Lord, art good and ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy." Psalm lxxxvi. 5.

But doth his power and strength move and stir this affection in him, and render his will inclined unto mercy? Yes. Moses, when pleading for forgiveness, says, "Let the power of my Lord be great. Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt even until now." Num. xiv. 17—19.

Are God's power and strength joined with mercy? Is it that which fits him for mercy? O bless him that you find so dreadful an attribute as power joined with mercy: why? You find them divided elsewhere, when they are to be exercised on others than the elect; "What if God willing to shew his wrath, and make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction." Rom. ix. 22. There power is joined with wrath; let us therefore adore this God that hath in this proclamation of mercy, Exod. xxxiv. 6, put the God strong and merciful together.

Do we find mercy and power joined together? Then trust in him at all times. Psalm lxii. 8. Are you in such a case and condition that you have no kind of hope or possibility of thought that such a thing should come to pass? but "trust in him at all times." Why? because power belongeth to him, Psalm lxii. 11, and mercy. verse 12. These two put together will effect any thing; what is too difficult for God the strong, and God the merciful?

Is mercy thus joined with power? See what need thou hast of his power and mercy every day, need of his strength, need of all mercies, to thy soul. How oft is thy heart apt to sink; thou canst not believe but so long as God helps thee to do it! How apt to faint in despondency and doubt! Dost thou find strength come in to help thee to believe? It is the strong God who helps thee: "Thou strengthenedst me with strength in my soul." Psalm cxxxviii. 3. Thou hast a heart weak to duty, feeble hands, weak knees: who strengthens thee in the inner man? He does it according to the riches of his glory, that is, of his mercy. Eph. iii. 16.

Is God strong and merciful? "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart all ye that hope in the Lord," Psalm xxxi. 24; for he is your strong God, and he is your merciful God. In-

deed, if we had faith and hearts to improve and put together these two things, what might we not obtain from the hands of God; where there is power to enable, and mercy to make willing, what cannot be done? A little of the strength of God, how doth it strengthen the soul? Make use of this strength. He is the glory of your strength. Psalm lxxxix. 17.

Doth power thus yoke with mercy! nay, is it the ratio of mercy? then take God's counsel to lay hold on his strength. "Fury is not in me" Isaiah xxvii. 4, against my church, but against briars and thorns. "Who would set briars and thorns against him in battle! He would go through them; he would burn them together." Is there no remedy? Yes, even for them there is a remedy. "Let them take hold of my strength." It is an allusion to Jacob's story that had power with God. The meaning is, humble yourselves; lay hold on my mercy. Mercy says it twice before Power's face, You may make peace with me, and you shall make peace with me.

GOD MERCIFUL.

To me this is a great thing, that when we go to pray we have the liberty to urge God to shew us mercy for his own sake; that although we have the benefit of the mercies, yet we may urge him thus: Thou shalt have the glory of it, thou shalt have the glory of thy grace by it, and the glory of thy mercy by it. It is yet again a greater advantage in praying, that we have all the mercies of God before us to spread before him. Mercies in his word might be limited, but in his nature they cannot. What may we not obtain at the hand of God, if we could improve this notion, to go to God to be merciful to us as God, and according to the mercies that are in his nature, and for the sake of them.

THE MERCIES OF GOD COMMITTED TO CHRIST.

God committed all the mercies that ever he had promised, or meant to bestow upon any or all of his children, into the hands of his Christ, to give forth to them; and constituted him to be his own executor, and hath given him an heart of mercy of equal largeness thereunto, and faithfulness to perform it unto every tittle, as himself. So as he that shall compare all those descriptions of God's kingdom in the foregone verses, with the expression of Christ's kingdom in Psalm lxxxix. 20—29, will readily acknowledge that God's Spirit in this Psalm did purposely set forth the former representation of God's kingdom, to shew that the like glory, yea, the same kingdom for substance, he hath devolved upon his son, and put into his hands.

THE MERCIES OF GOD'S NATURE A MOTIVE TO THE ACTING OF FAITH.

Let us now consider, if that the view and light of the mercies of God's nature let into the soul, and shining upon the promises of mercy, like as the light upon colours, do not superadd a lustre and life to them, and impregnate them, as the sun doth the plants and all things below, that have either life, spirit, or virtue in them. Let us try if the thoughts of these mercies in God will not put life into, and quicken the soul of him, that views them together with those promises; yea, and contributes so much to *persuade* to the faith of them, although the promises be but *indefinite promises* or declarations of God's will touching the forgiveness of sin; although these promises be indefinite, I say, as to persons, not naming or excluding any.

There are three more eminent acts of faith for forgiveness, and all other spiritual blessings.

1. There is a sight of the things promised or to be believed, which hath a subsistence of the things promised, made and given to the heart of a believer, together with the proposal of them.

2. There is a discerning of a goodness in them, to allure the will and affections to embrace them, and cleave to them.

3. There is a trusting on God, and a relying on him, for the performance of them.

First,—The first act of faith is a sight of the things believed, with a real subsistence given to them in the soul till the time of performance. Now the mercies in God apprehended do give the most real subsistence unto forgiveness, and all other benefits whatsoever. Faith is the substance or subsistence of things hoped for, Heb. xi. 1; and likewise the evidence or sight of things not yet seen. For which compare Heb. xi. 1. and 6, 19, 27. God in the mean while, during the space and time that comes between the promise and the performance itself, is pleased to vouchsafe an aforehand image, and substantial impress, to support the heart.

Our Saviour, instructing in particular acts of faith, Mark xi. 23, 24, first proposeth this general rule requisite to all true faith,—“Have faith in God,” v. 22, because into that faith of him, or something in him, as his power or truth, &c., is the subsistence of every particular thing promised resolved. “He that comes to God must believe that he is,” Heb. xi. 6. The attribute or relation in God, which is the most proper and direct cause of the thing promised, being viewed by faith together with the promise, is of all others fitted most properly to give him subsistence to our faith. Whensoever the heart of a sinner shall attempt to believe the forgiveness of sin, nothing can be supposed in God, or concerning God revealed,

that should give a greater reality, and subsistence, and certainty of the promises to the heart of a believer, than the consideration of those mercies in God, which are the most eminent cause of that forgiveness promised. When the soul considers that he who is so great a God, and so greatly merciful and gracious, is the same God who hath promised, and hath means to make it good, what can be so great a persuasive to believe as the light hereof? And the greater the light which is brought down into such a promise, and with the promise shines into the heart, the more doth the light of the true subsistence of forgiveness shine with it, and become realized to the soul, and appear clothed with such an evidence, as will efficaciously move and draw out real faith.

To give other things may require the help of some other attribute: but pardon of sin peculiarly and immediately holds of mercy, is a pure emanation from grace, and issues in the glory thereof above all other in God, Eph. i. 7. In Christ we have the forgiveness of sin according to the riches of his grace: "The Lord God gracious and merciful;" and then "pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin." Exod. xxxiv. 7. This is a stream that flows out immediately from that fountain; the Lord is "good and ready to forgive, plenteous in mercy," Psalm lxxxvi. 5. His being ready to forgive flows gushing forth from his goodness, and his being plenteous in mercy.

The second act of faith is to embrace the promise, to which an enlarged consideration of the mercies of God's nature doth wonderfully persuade the heart. Unto a truly broken humbled sinner, the mercies that are in God, out of which he pardons, needs must have infinitely more of goodness and sweetness in them than pardon, or all things else that are in the promises, or apprehended with them. David, in Psalm cix. 21. first laid hold on the goodness that is in the mercy of God, and then prays, "deliver me."



The same you have, Psalm lxix. 16. "Hear me, for thy loving-kindness is good." And when the thing sought for comes to be granted and obtained, a believer rejoiceth more in the mercy and loving-kindness he finds to be in God's heart towards him, than in the benefit vouchsafed. "I will be glad, and rejoice in thy mercy; for thou hast considered my trouble, thou hast known my soul in adversities," Psalm xxxi. 7. That God's mercy and kindness should own his soul at such a time was more than the deliverance. And as the mercy of God stirs up the soul thus to a rejoicing at the performance, so it pleasantly allures and obligeth the soul to trust on the promise in hope of performance; as those words imply: "If so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious," 1 Peter ii. 3. It is God you see who is said to be tasted, and the sweetness of his mercies; it is not so much the sweetness of pardon, of salvation, or of the promise, but, over and above all, of God's grace that is tasted in and with them all.

The third act of faith is trust in God. The ample consideration of God's mercies will prove most effective to cause, as David's word is, Psalm cxix. 49, the heart to trust in God, over and above the consideration of the promises alone.

Though the promises are the means by which we believe, yet it is the promiser that is the basis or the foundation on whom our hearts ultimately and quietly rest for the performance. All our confidence is therefore resolved into the person, and what he is. There are two things especially that give the real truth to any promise, and chiefly beget the adherence thereto in the soul of any that confide thereon. 1. The honesty of the promiser, in respect of a real intention in him, when he made the promise, and still continuing in him, to perform it. 2. That in the event it will assuredly *de facto* be performed.

Mercy, pure mercy, tenderness of mercy, made the

promises. It could not be to gain or bring us unto himself, under the pretensions of offers of mercy and the overtures thereof: for himself knew and foreknew that we all were and would be such wretched reckless creatures in ourselves, that all the promulgations and offers that should or could be made, would not rise or move our hearts a jot unto the least attempt of nearer access unto God, unless himself first moved us thereunto. Mercy itself must work with the promises, Eph. ii. 4, 5. Faith is the gift of God, and not of ourselves. It had been in vain to have made promises in expectation of our being willing, or of our coming in, if God himself were not resolved. God must show us mercy to cause us to will and run. As mercy was the first and sole mover, so it must itself be the performer, or all is vain.

Our great God did, long before he put forth those promises, both know and perfectly consider with himself, what riches of grace and mercy lay by him, whereby he found his own sufficiency over and overabundantly to perform such promises. "I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end." Jer. xxix. 11.

His truth in his promises doth spring, and hath its rise from that fountain, his superabundancy of mercy. And as the promises are said to be "true in Christ," 2 Cor. i. 18, 20, because he purchased them; as upon the like ground they may also be said to be true in God, because mercy is the founder and maintainer of them. And from hence it follows, that as God's knowing his own heart, and riches, and all-sufficiency to perform what he should promise, caused him to engage his truth at first in making these promises; so answerably it is operative in the soul of a believer, the more it comes to believe the truth of those promises, as there is good reason it should do so. For there is a sure and undeniable rule, that what

most moves God's heart to do a thing, that, when declared and revealed by God, must needs be most efficacious to cause the heart of a sinner to believe that he will do it.

Let the thoughts of these treasures of mercies encourage us to come to him. Let us consider that there is no other use of all these riches of mercy, but to be given all forth unto sinners for his glory. Do but possess thy heart then with the thought, that there is this fulness of grace, these great riches of mercy in God, and it will make thy soul easy of belief, that there is a willingness in God to bestow them, and that he is resolved to give them out to thee whenever thou comest to him, especially since himself hath set them forth and proclaimed them for this purpose to us; as we find in the scriptures, that where God doth set himself to persuade sinners to come to him, he thinks it sufficient to give promises of mercy and pardon.

When men's consciences are thoroughly awakened to see their sins, their unbelief on the other hand awakens thoughts in them to limit God's mercies, which is the phrase used, Psalm lxxviii. 41. For men's narrow spirits, if not enlarged by faith, do much measure God's heart by their own, and so think God to be like themselves. Psalm l. 21. They cannot imagine how one so high, so great, and so greatly provoked, should be able to forgive, and therefore apprehend that he cannot be willing; and hence a thousand jealousies of God do arise in men's souls, which are as full of dark cells of unbelief, as the earth is of vast caverns. As men's hearts rise not up to glorify God as God, Rom. i. 21, so not to believe mercies to be in him as a God so great and infinite, proportionable to his greatness.

If God but possess and fill thy soul with an ample and enlarged apprehension of the mercies that are in himself, this will create withal an encouragement

to thee, that he intends good to thy soul in particular. As the flood when it rose higher and higher, did lift up together with itself the ark ; so an inuring thy soul to those comprehensions will insensibly elevate and raise up thy soul to a confidence, that God doth intend all good to thee. The full and clear revelation of any divine truth, in a way of subsistence, doth leave some application of itself to a man's soul. If a discovery be made of good things, the manifestation thereof doth usually leave an encouragement in the heart, that they belong and appertain to one's self. The very manifestation of them, when God makes it, carries so much engraven in it. As this is found true in experience, so that definition of faith, Heb. xi. 1, 2, confirms it : even that the main of faith lies in a laying hold of the substance of the things themselves, which when it is made in the abundance of the object revealed, the very sight and presence thereof is that which mainly draws in the heart to apply it, and cleave and adhere unto it for rest.

That which is the most hardened core of unbelief in us consists chiefly in the doubting of the plenteousness and fulness of mercies that are in him to pardon us. This is the great and deep sore of men's hearts, if men would but know it in themselves, as Solomon speaks, 1 Kings viii. 38, and in our believing these things of our God, it is that the main item of faith doth lie, though men discover it not, and in that point their faith needs most to be strengthened and relieved. And the one thing apprehended once, though but with slender half-promises of mercy to us, which are but intimations rather than promises, will yet be abundantly effective to persuade the heart, and beget in it a good hope, through grace, of mercy for itself, and thereupon to come in and turn unto God, who will then reveal himself in other promises more fully to the soul.

THE GOD OF ALL GRACE.

1 PETER V. 10.

“The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.”

THOUGH we find every where else *the grace of God*, and that *God is gracious*, and *full of compassion*, yet no where but in this place that he is the **GOD OF ALL GRACE**. And this is not spoken only to shew what he is in his nature simply, but what he is to his children; even as elsewhere, when it is said, *God is love*, 1 John iv. 8; and the like is not said of any other attribute. And what doth it signify? That God, in point of temptations, sufferings, trials of his children, and in all things else, deals with them purely upon the terms and principles of free grace; and will, in the issue, shew that he is no other than a God of grace, and of all grace towards us, all whose ways are mercy and love. Psalm xxv. 10.

As God is said to be “the God of all comfort,” 2 Cor. i. 3, because “he comforteth in all tribula-

tion," v. 4, and "comforteth them that are cast down," vii. 6; and because he hath in readiness a particular special comfort to give forth to every discomfort, and that in due time: so he is a God of all grace in respect of all gracious effects, which grace in God doth afford; and in respect to every need the saint may be supposed to be in, since God hath a proportionable grace for the supply and relief of it.

Though, however, that of his being "the God of all comfort" serves to clear the phrase, that he is "the God of all grace," unto all gracious effects; yet these two are not adequate, or of the same commensuration, but of the two his being "the God of all grace" is larger in respect of its gracious effects; for God's dispensations of grace are larger than his dispensations of comfort in this world. He gives grace where he does not give comfort; yea, and often he gives most grace where he gives not comfort, further than to uphold the soul from sinking. He carries on some souls, as he dealt with Christ at his death, unto the highest gracious acts of obedience, while yet he vouchsafes no comfort: witness the doleful expression of Christ, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" when he was in the highest performance of obedience, "obedience unto death." Thus in thy temptation God influences thee with grace, secretly assisting and strengthening, when he sensibly affords not comforting grace. Take this assurance home to thee, thou who hast been so many years "afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted."

There is no temptation that doth or can befall a saint, who is under the dominion of free grace, but hath a grace prepared, to be applied in due time. But you will say, God may be almighty, and nothing is too hard for his power, when yet I may not be relieved. But I reply, that he is "the God of all grace," who is in himself also the God

of all power; and hence I infer, that he hath a gracious will to put forth power, and to put forth all his power; for it is at grace's disposal. That he is the God of all grace makes him all willing: and that he is the God of all power, speaks his ability to help according to his will, which grace hath engaged; according to that of the Psalmist, "God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God. Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy." Psalm lxii. 11, 12.

As he hath grace for all needs, so he is a God of all grace to give forth help as the need and occasion shall require; for need is the time and season for grace to shew itself. "Let us, therefore, come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Heb. iv. 16. So Solomon frames his prayer, that God would "maintain the cause of his people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require; Heb. the thing of a day in his day." 1 Kings viii. 59.

God is a God of all grace in respect of dispensation, and will manifest himself to be so, and that by instances of all sorts; that so in the latter day he may have the honour of having been not only the God of all grace potentially, but the God of all grace actually, and in the performance of it. There is one sin, indeed, which is excluded, and that is the sin against the Holy Ghost, the devils' sin, a settled revenge against God, and so is distinguished from all other sins that are "human," or "common to man." 1 Cor. x. 13. Christ expressly saith, all manner of sins shall be forgiven unto men this only excepted; and the reason is, that God is a God of all grace; and therefore will shew all grace in pardoning all sorts of sins. And as this holds true in pardoning, so in supporting and relieving grace. Some will be apt to say, their temptations have been such as never befel any that have been saved. If

thou hast no instance of any that ever was under the like, and knowest no particular promise or example for thy case; yet this one declaration of God, that he is the God of all grace, speaks home to thy case fully and sufficiently. God said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee," and that was enough. If no man or angel could tell thee of any instance or example, yet this is instead of all, he is the God of all grace, and that will reach thy case.

God commands us, who have but little grace in us, to abound in every grace: "As ye abound in every thing, in faith and utterance and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also." 2 Cor. viii. 7. He is speaking of the relieving the necessities of others, and the scope and intent of God's command is, and there is that in our grace which may be wrought up to it, that it should be drawn out as any opportunity is offered to exercise it. And will that God, who commands this of us, and professeth of himself, that he is the God of all grace to relieve the wants of those whom he hath taken care of, not abundantly supply you? If in these his commands, he doth bind and oblige us unto obedience, then surely, he obligeth himself by his promises to perform them. The very same thing that he commands us towards others, he will himself certainly fulfil. We have no grace but what he puts into us, and shall God, who is the fountain of all grace, not execute himself what he requires of us? God saith, as it were of himself, I am a holy God, true, just, faithful; I abound in all these, and in every perfection else; shall I not abound in this grace also to relieve the spiritual needs of my poor children? What doth the apostle John say: "Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" 1 John iii. 17. If God

speak thus to us concerning a brother, to us, that love but in part; and command us, if the case require it of us, "to lay down our lives for the brethren," ver. 16: shall not that God, of whom the same apostle saith, that he is love itself; and of whom he saith, "hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us;" shall not he, if he see a son in need of spiritual grace and deliverance out of temptation, draw out his compassion towards him?

But you ask, what may I, or any particular saint, apply to ourselves of all this. You find an example of the application made by David in Psalm lix. 10, "The God of my mercy shall prevent me." God, "the God of all grace," is the doctrine: God, "the God of my mercy," is the application. Thou mayest say of this God, He is the God of all the mercies, that any way belong to me, or that I can have need of. It is a wonderful condescension, that God should make this an attribute of himself: I am the God of the mercy of every particular saint of mine.

You may interpret it of mercy in the nature of God, and in that sense you may say, all the mercies that are in God are my mercies. In this same Psalm you find David saying, ver. 16, "I will sing aloud of thy mercy." He calls it God's mercy, and yet again, ver. 17, he says, "The God of my mercy." The meaning is, all the mercy of God is my mercy; I can lay claim to it as need is. And the reason of it is pregnant; for, is God our God? Then all the mercies in God upon the same account are our mercies; it was mercy in him that moved him to become our God at first, and that made him make over himself to us; so that if thou canst say, The God of my mercy, this doth draw the whole of God's being, and all the grace in him to thyself. Art thou called, do but look through this consideration: I am one whom God hath called with a holy calling and

saved, and so thou mayest draw in all the grace of God's nature, and thy faith may take it in this one expression, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious." God is the God of all grace to the brotherhood. 1 Peter v. 9, 10. If any one soul had all the needs that all the brotherhood have, if nothing would serve his turn best, but all the grace God hath for the brotherhood, yea, in the whole of himself, he would lay it out for thee. The Lord help us to consider these things, for they are true. Thou usest to say, this or that is my sin, and it is so; a grievous sin, and thou art prone to it; again, this is my misery. But withal, I beseech thee to consider, that God is the God of thy mercy, and that all the mercy in God upon occasion and for a need, is thine: and upon as good a title as that sin is thine: for the free donation of God and of his will, is as good a title as the inheritance of sin in thee.

The Covenant of grace is entailed on the children of believers. God most usually makes such his choice.

THE CHILDREN OF GODLY PARENTS ARE THE LORD'S INHERITANCE.

PSALM cxviii. 3.

For children are an heritage of the Lord; and the fruit of the womb is his reward."

THE Psalm here speaks of what children are unto God, and holy parents; for unto such only is the blessing given by God, as a reward of their holiness and righteousness; and the words immediately following do tell us, that the Psalmist expressly speaks of blessings which God gives his "beloved," of which this blessing of children he makes the chief and the greatest. And it is also certain that he speaks of children, as supposed holy and godly; for otherwise they are not a reward; but as Solomon speaks of a foolish or ungodly child, he is a curse, a shame, and sorrow to him that begat him, and to her that brought him forth.

The Psalm was made (as appears by the title of it,) either for Solomon; and, therefore, it is probable, was made by David the father, of and for Solomon, his

son; who was, for his father's sake, "the beloved of God," 2 Sam. xii. 24, 15, and upon whom the same mercies and covenant of David were entailed together with his kingdom; and what is said in the former verses of this Psalm agrees to him, for he it was who was to build God's house, to keep and preserve the kingdom and city of Jerusalem in peace, and to have "sleep" v. 2, rest given him by God, "from all his enemies round about him:" And you will see how fitly this psalm concerns him, if you compare the prophecy of him, 1 Chron. xxii. 9, 10, with the instruction here given him in the three first verses of this psalm.

Now this Solomon, thus owned and beloved of God, David himself looked at as a child given for a reward of all his piety and uprightness, and rejoicing in so great a blessing, he takes occasion to pronounce of other holy men's children, that which to his comfort he had found true of his own beloved Solomon. And this upon a just ground: for as the covenant made with David is set forth unto us as the example of God's covenant with his elect: so Solomon is here by David considered as the pattern of all the like children of godly parents, of whom he declares, "Lo, such children as Solomon was, holy and beloved of God, are an heritage of the Lord, a rich and great reward; and blessed is the man that hath his quiver full of them."

Such children may be understood to be an inheritance unto their parents; and also the inheritance of the Lord himself, through and for their parents' sake, a choice and peculiar people unto God himself as the owner and possessor of them. Thus every where in scripture, to be the chosen people of God, and to be his inheritance are all one; for instance, Psalm xxviii. 12, "Save thy people, and bless thine inheritance;" and Psalm xxxiii. 12, "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance." Also in 1 Peter

v. 3. the apostle calls the church the Lord's heritage, and through their being thus the property of God, they become an inheritance from the Lord as the donor, unto their parents, even the richest they can possess. What greater favour can there be than this, that God should first take their children to be an inheritance to himself, and to make them heirs of all things, and when they are thus enabled and enriched, then to put them into their parents' arms as a rich inheritance unto them? Then as Christ said, John xvii. 6, of the children which God had given him here, so may they say, "they were thine, and thou gavest them me;" and as it is in Psalm xvi. 6. "Lo! I have a goodly heritage."

There is nothing that can so truly be accounted our own as our children; they are branches to the root, yea, they are ourselves multiplied. The parents being servants to God, and he their God, their children therefore do, by a natural right of inheritance, fall unto him, as the children of "servants born in the house," did unto their masters by the law. Exod. xxi. 4.

We see the value of holy children to their parents, confirmed to us, from the esteem that Abraham, when his heart had been new enlarged by the highest communion with God, did put upon such a blessing; as also what esteem God did put upon it to him by promising this blessing then, when his heart was drawn out to the largest expressions of love. Gen. xv. i. God came to Abraham in a vision, and said to him, "I am thy exceeding great reward." Here was the deepest and most comprehensive expression of love that God ever made to any man: and Abraham takes advantage of this, and improves it, and says to God; "What wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?" So that a child, next to his own salvation, was the gift and blessing in Abraham's desires and thoughts: upon this hint of Abraham, God promiseth him Isaac,

and that his seed should be as the stars of heaven, and this son to be an heir, not of his goods only, as v. 4, but of his God also ; to this the covenant is expressly enlarged, chap. xvii. 7, and so God premiseth to take his seed to be his own inheritance, as well as to be heirs of Abraham.

**CHILDREN OF BELIEVING PARENTS INCLUDED IN THE
COVENANT OF GRACE.**

I desire now to prove that the children of believing parents, even of us Gentiles now under the gospel, are included by God within the covenant of grace, as well as Abraham's, or David's seed, within that covenant of theirs.

We being Abraham's seed (Gal. iii. 29) as well as the Jews, and having the same covenant, are therefore heirs of the promise, and so of that promise which was made to Abraham and the Jews : " I will be the God of thee and of thy seed."

As an instance of this privilege being communicated to a Gentile convert by Christ himself, on the ground that he was a son of Abraham, being become a believer, we have Luke xix. 1—10 ; Zaccheus was a chief publican, surely, therefore, a Gentile ; few among the Jews were publicans, because of the hatred of their own nation, and the principal office of trust would not have been granted to them by the emperors. The Jews usually called the Gentiles by the name of sinners, as Gal. ii. 15 ; and thus they clamoured against Christ for going to be guest to such an one. The answer which Christ gave to their murmuring, v. 9. declares that he who is not by birth a son of Abraham, yet is made one now by grace : and he makes this the reason why his house should be saved also, because the father of the family was now

a believer. "This day is salvation come to this house, inasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham."

In like manner, when the Apostles came to preach the gospel to a Gentile householder, they carried the offer in the same terms as a motive to conversion. St. Paul said to the jailor at Philippi, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thine house," Acts xvi. 31.

We find also, in the event that the gospel spread itself through whole households, as is recorded of Cornelius, Acts x; of Lydia, Acts xvi; and of the household of Stephanas, 1 Cor. i. 16.

We see, in Isaiah lix. 21, that God respects the fathers of the Jews, and his covenant to them, in the future calling of that nation, though it be under the gospel. "This is my covenant; my Spirit shall not depart out of the mouth of thy seed, and of thy seed's seed, from henceforth and for ever." Also in Deut. xxx. 6, where God gives the covenant of the gospel, as opposed to that of the law, he says, "I will circumcise thy heart and the heart of thy seed."

THE GENTILE CHURCH HATH THE SAME PRIVILEGE WITH THE JEWISH.

The churches of the Gentiles have a privilege, in conformity with that which the Jews enjoyed as a church, described in the eleventh of Romans, a promise of succession to their children, as continuers of the church. The state of the Gentiles, when grafted in, is there represented as answerable to that of the Jews before their cutting off; they are branches engrafted upon a root (in danger, it is true, of being cut off, if not continuing in the faith), partakers of the same fatness from the root; a part of which spiritual fatness was, that God would continue his name

on their children; "if the root be holy so are the branches," ver. 16.

By comparison of the eleventh of Romans with 1 Cor. vii. 14, we find it yet more clear that our seed is now included in the covenant of grace, as the Jews' seed was in that of their fathers: for, in 1 Cor. vii. 14, the apostle says of the children of believing Gentiles, "they are holy," in respect to their relation to their parents; as in Romans xi. 16: arguing the Jews' conversion in future times, he says, "If the first fruits be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches;" and we know that true real holiness was there intended and promised; for the declarations of God concerning the elect of the Jewish nation are, in Heb. x. 16, shown to extend to their inward conversion and sanctification.

CHILDREN OF A BELIEVING PARENT ACCOUNTED HOLY.

The Apostle had it in view in 1 Cor. vii. to resolve some cases of conscience about marriage, which the Corinthians had written to him about; ver. 1.

The letter of the Old Testament would seem to warrant, yea command the leaving or putting away the unbelieving party, and also the pronouncing their children so begotten, unclean, although one party were a believer. For thus indeed it was among the Jews; for when in, and after, the captivity they had married strange heathen wives, and begotten children, you shall find, Ezra x. 3, that after a solemn fast they did covenant to put away all the wives, and the children begotten of them. The like you have also, Neh. ix. And so the place, in Mal. ii. 11, where the prophet says that God sought a holy

seed, is spoken upon this very occasion of marrying strange wives; and so it was that they profaned the holiness of that people by that mixture, both defiling themselves thereby, and their seed also. It is no wonder that from these instances in the Old Testament, the Corinthians should take up scruples whether it were lawful for a believer to dwell with an unbelieving husband or wife.

The apostle declares to these Gentiles that this Jewish law was not in force to them; that no believing husbands, should, or might put away their unbelieving wives, as the Jews were commanded to do; nor account the children unclean. Yea, affirms that the gospel afforded a privilege to the believer, which that ceremonial strictness allowed not; even this, that by the believer, and for his sake, the unbeliever is sanctified to all the ends of marriage; and that the covenant with the believer is so strong and full of grace, that it prevails to convey the covenant of grace to the children, even in this case wherein the law pronounced them unclean. The reason of this difference lies in this, that the marriages among the Jews were accommodated to their church state and polity, as a nation singled out and separated from all other nations, and their seed to be holy also in a type. If any therefore amongst them had married a strange wife, this had bred an irreparable confusion in his posterity to all ages, therefore for the peace' sake of the commonwealth, the Jews were required to put away such with their children. But this rule reached not to the Gentiles to bind them at all, and the gospel let all obligations, civil and natural, stand in full force as before, leaving inviolable the primitive law of marriage, according to God's institution at first.

In such a case as that of one married before being afterwards converted, if then God, by the law of nature, holds them still to the marriage, which through

their ignorance they entered into, and by his providence were found in when called; then, by the law of free grace, he will not withhold the privilege of believers' marriages, but will sanctify it unto them, as if they both were believers; for none shall ever lose by any inconvenient necessity they are cast into, in obedience to his command. The goodness of God is such, that grace prevails to convey the covenant, and make the child accepted, notwithstanding the unsanctifiedness and curse of the unbeliever. And therefore, though this will by no means warrant entering into such marriages (for when out of choice the sons of God did so, God cursed their marriages, Gen. vi. 3, and all flesh became corrupt), yet when so married before conversion, or repenting after such a marriage, they may notwithstanding expect this privilege still to continue unto them and theirs.

WHAT OUR JUDGMENT SHOULD BE OF THE HOLINESS OF
OUR CHILDREN.

We are taught by God's thoughts of believers' children, the rule by which he would have us to judge of them. What God calls holy, call not thou common or unclean. He would not have pronounced thus concerning them, and in title set them up as great princes, if they had not amongst them an inheritance and possession answerable. We ought therefore to esteem the infant children of godly parents as holy. We cannot say this if come to riper years, unless they hold forth a work of grace, as Timothy did, concerning whom the remembrance of his faith was the ground of Paul's persuasion; though the same in his mother and grandmother added a confirmation thereunto, 2 Tim. i. 5. There could be no other rule to judge of infants' holiness, than this of their parents' covenant: these poor

lambs have nothing to show for it, but that they are their children, and such we ought to account them, not in the mere judgment of charity, but with such a faith as makes us suspend all thoughts to the contrary, resting in what is revealed for us to think, and waiting till God reveal the contrary, and so far, in the mean time, judging them to be saints, as that it should bind our consciences to perform all duties to them as unto saints.

It is not to be understood by the declaration that their children are holy, that God does certainly and infallibly sanctify them all, but that he sanctifies some of them, yea more of them than of any other sort; but how many we know not. All God's promises given unto men in his revealed will, are but indefinite expressions of his decrees and purposes. Some promises are like the star that led the wise men to the very town where Christ was, so they do direct us to the mines where God's election lies. Here a promise stands over the mass of believers' children; pointing at them above all mankind beside; because among them election is most and chiefly to be found.

Some of these indefinite promises are more express than others, as, for example, the passages which instruct us in the purposes of God towards the Gentiles, are as if one should speak of gold mines in the West Indies, not defining where; which how wide an expression were it, and how far off should such an one speak? But if he should say, there are abundance of great mines in the land of Jewry, even within that little compass of people, how nigh should he speak, and how nigh would every man of them, that had fields and possessions, think himself of the possession of a mine? This were a near defining of them, a contracting of them within a narrower circle: but if a family were designed, as the house of David, like the naming of a particular field where their

treasure were hid, this were yet more near; and such several degrees of indefinites, more or less God hath been pleased to reveal himself and his decrees according to his good pleasure. See it in the first promise given, "the seed of the woman;" it took in all mankind, and pointed out one man amongst all. The next promise contracted it to a narrower compass, even to Abraham's seed, cutting off all nations and families besides; and yet further to Isaac; then Esau was cut off, and God limited it to Jacob; then it was confined to Judah, but Judah had many families; then it was contracted to David and to Bethlehem the city of David, and then yet nearer, to a Virgin of the house of David, and then the star stands even over that spot where the Messiah was born. So in the choice of David to be king; first he makes an indefinite promise of the sceptre to Judah; which naming of the tribes was remote, even one amongst thousands; then he narrows the family,—“I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided me a king amongst my sons,” 1 Sam. xvi. 1. This was still indefinite, but very near, for it was one among seven, and Samuel is bid to sanctify them all, and that they come to the sacrifice, ver. 5, for he knew not whom would fall upon.

Thus it is in the promises of salvation. The first promise, “Peace on earth, goodwill towards men,” Luke ii. 14, was very remote, and yet was a true expression of God's decree that he had chosen millions of men, not angels. But then it came to the Jews, “I am not sent, but to the lost sheep of Israel,” says Christ, Matt. xv. 24; and “ye are the children of the prophets and of the covenant,” “unto you first I have sent his Son to bless you,” Acts iii. 25, 26. This was near; but when it came to such as were converted, “salvation is come to this house,” Luke xix. 9, “Thou shalt be saved, and thy household,” Luke

xvi. 31, yea, your children are holy—it comes so near that the Apostle indefinitely pronounceth them truly holy upon it. In that heap of believer's children, there is so much wheat of election, and so little chaff comparatively, that he ventures to call the heap "holy."

It is not here, as among Jesse's sons, one in seven; but it may be, and sometimes falls out, seven to one of them prove godly; neither does that promise to the poor, "God hath chosen the poor of this world," James ii. 5, come so near as doth this promise. He tells us not how many or who are the holy ones, but he reveals so much of his mind as shall set us a work to bring them all to the ordinances; that he may bless those unto whom he intends a blessing.

THE HARMONY OF GOD'S DISPENSATIONS.

It is in harmony with the other dispensations of God towards men, that he should ordain the children of holy parents to be holy. All spiritual affections of love to others, though drawn forth in and by fleshly relations, will continue for ever: so what spiritual love hath been drawn out between man and wife, will continue in heaven, as it is an honour to Christ, for ever; so "I and the children whom thou hast given me." And to ministers, their converts are their crown in the day of Christ, and so likewise are such children to such fathers. It had been a small thing to Abraham to have been counted the father of the faithful, if his comfort from it had been but what he saw when he was here, and saw none but Isaac and Ishmael of his seed. No, it is yet to come, when at the day of judgment he shall see so many of God's beloved ones to have sprung from him.

On God's part, it became him to do this favour for

his children ; for it agrees with the exactest rules of friendship that can be found on earth, to be a friend unto the family of a friend, a friend unto his house after him. David and Jonathan were the noblest pair of friends we read of in story ; and see what a covenant they make each with the other, 1 Sam. xx. 14, 15, " Thou shalt not only, while yet I live, show me the kindness of the Lord, but also thou shalt not cut off thy kindness from my house for ever : " and v. 42, their oath was between each other's seed for ever, " between my seed and thy seed." Now God professeth himself the lowest and completest friend, and therefore no strain of friendship shall men take up, which he will be wanting in, yea, wherein he will not exceed. What! 4000 years after to remember his covenant with Abraham and Isaac, as in the future conversion of the Jews their seed he will? Rom. ii. 28 : the apostle gives this as a reason of their conversion, " they are beloved for their father's sake : " What an unheard of friendship is this! Can men boast of the like? You know God professeth of Abraham, that he was his friend, James ii. 23, and in this very respect God chose his seed ; and the covenant with them takes in this very consideration, Isaiah xli. 8, " Thou Israel art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend." You have it also pleaded by them, 2 Chron. xx. 7. " Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham, thy friend, for ever? "

It is the plan of God to give glory to grace, and to show his wisdom, by ordering that, by what way or means sin comes upon mankind for his ruin and destruction, God takes up these very means to save by, and restore what has been used as the channel of sin, to become the channel of grace. Thus, as woman was Satan's instrument whereby he wrought man's

ruin; so God used her to bring forth that one man Christ, who should restore and save us. Again, as for the sin of man, his children fell from their dignity with him; so if men will turn to God, they may be made instruments of conveying a blessing to their children, greater than the curse of sin and death, which they have brought upon them, a grace surpassing that sin; *thus largely doth God extend his acts of favour.*

OBLIGATION ON PARENTS TO BE HOLY.

The use to be made of the doctrine here proved, is the great and binding obligation on the children of godly parents, to be themselves godly. For otherwise (like Reuben) what a dignity do they fall from! and how unnaturally do they act towards God in casting off God, the God of their fathers, which no people ever did: as is expressed, Acts xiii. 46. It is the argument of a whole chapter, wherein God pleads with the Jews, Jer. ii. 9, complaining that they should forsake him as the God of their fathers, whom he had entered into the covenant with, and contrasting their conduct with that of other nations. Also that their practice was degenerating from their forefathers, appears verse 21, where God says, he planted their fathers a noble vine, wholly a right seed, for all the patriarchs were godly, how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me, the children (though of so noble a root) becoming wild branches. The holiness of the fathers increases the children's sins and punishments, if they prove not answerably holy. How often comes it in to make up the measure of the sinfulness of those wicked kings, "He walked not in the ways of David his father?" What! prove a rebel to thy father's God? so you have it in Moses' song, Exod.

xv. 2, and therefore say, as they there, "The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation, my father's God, and I will exalt him." You see he riseth higher upon that double relation, "He is my father's God, and I will exalt him." What wilt thou prove a traitor to thy father's friend! This is the highest ingratitude that can be. See what Solomon says in Prov. xxvii. 10, "Thine own friend, and thy father's friend forsake not; such a friend is hardly to be found, therefore forsake him not. Solomon renewed the league of amity with Hiram, 1 Kings v. 1—12, merely because friendship had been between him and his father David, and so do thou with God, who will then love thee for thy own sake, and double his love upon thee for thy father's sake.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO CHILDREN TO BE HOLY.

Such encouragements and helps to obedience ought to provoke the children of godly parents, when converted, to more holiness. As your obedience shall be first acceptable before others, so you should be the first and most forward of all others, in matters of obedience. Being worthies, you should fight in the fore-front; and though others of your rank do worthily, you should exceed them all. How does ancient nobility in a family raise the spirits to more noble actions, than others of an inferior birth aspire to? There is no disposition in nature, but it is found in, and heightened by grace; God takes in all natural dispositions, and confirms gracious dispositions suitable and like unto them. So let this principle draw upon your spirits in a spiritual way. Be you unto God above others, "a royal generation," 1 Peter ii. 9, and like David's worthies, excelling all his other soldiers. Consider that your engagements are double,

to those of other men: even as courtiers reckon themselves to be doubly the servants of the king, not as his subjects only, but as belonging to his family. So are you doubly become the servants of God; and therefore should do him double service. Thus David having a godly mother, reckoned that as a special obligation on him to serve God. So Psalm cxvi. 16, "Truly, Lord, I am thy servant, I am thy servant," he speaks as owing a double obligation, the one personal, "thou hast loosed my bonds," given me my life; the other relating to his parents, "I am the son of thy handmaid."

It was the law, that the sons of bond women should be servants by birth, so now doth God claim a special propriety in you.

ENCOURAGEMENT TO CHILDREN IN BELIEVING.

This doctrine may also be exceedingly helpful to the children of godly parents in their believing and coming to Christ.

You are not to make it a foundation of your faith, as the carnal Jews did: "We have Abraham to our father," John viii. 39; for whilst you have not the faith and works of Abraham, you have the devil to your father, v. 44. See the Lord's rebuke to the presumption of the ungodly Jews, Ezek. xvi. 3. "Thy birth is of the land of Canaan;" it is to me as if "thy father were an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite." You must be emptied of such carnal confidences, as grounds of believing to build your faith upon; and you must be brought to close with God's free grace alone, as simply as if you had been never so much a stranger to the common-wealth of Israel. There is no difference when it comes to the matter of being justified, "all are justified freely by his grace," Rom. iii. 23, 24, and you must be as much

beholden to it to ~~save~~ you, as the Turks and heathens.

But though the doctrine may not be the *ground* of your faith, it may serve as a great *furtherance* to your faith other ways, and in other respects, both when you first come to believe, and likewise in temptations. You have encouragement beyond others to cast yourselves upon Christ, it is as it were two to one in your favour, the kingdom of God is come near unto you. When a king was to be chosen out of all the tribes it was held ground enough for every tribe, and every man of them, to present themselves before the Lord though in the end the lot was to fall but upon one man; and so Samuel bade them do. 1 Sam. x. 16. "Now then, present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and by your thousands:" every man has a slender hope that he might be king; but when the tribe of Benjamin was taken, every family and man of that tribe had a nearer hope. But when it came to the family of Matri, how great hopes must needs give to all of that family, though it were to fall but upon one man. Such hopes, and far larger have you, for this crown is not to be set upon the head of one only, but sometimes all of a family. There are fewer obstacles in your way, the hindrance at which many stumble, of sad and weighty improbabilities, are removed out of your path, and there is a probability in your favour which should greatly help forward the work of faith, and silence temptations. Christ invites and entreats you, in a special manner, to give him the first of your love. We may say to you, as the disciples said to the blind man, "Be of good comfort, he calleth you," Mark x. 48 and thou mayest be emboldened to come into God's presence, the rather because of this, and may form a plea from it, and say to him, 'Thou, Lord, hast given me this light about thy decrees; thy word tells me that the inheritance of heaven is bequeathed

by thee to the children of thy children: Lo, therefore, O Lord, thy servant presents himself before thee as one of those, and so extracted, not knowing but that this estate may belong to me, and I do come to thee, who keepest these records, to know whether such an estate be befallen me. I pray thee, therefore, to call to mind the unfeigned faith that dwelt in my parents, and which I hope thou hast ordained to be in me also. And do thou consider, that thou hast further set my heart to seek thee, and more especially invited me, and hast certified me, that I shall be doubly welcome. Being thus emboldened, lo, I am come to ask of thee: Is not my name in the list of thy beloved ones? Am not I one of thy elect too?' And whilst thou art urging God thus, ere thou art aware, the light of his countenance shall shine upon thee, as it did upon Jacob, when he pleaded with God, as "the God of his father Abraham and his father Isaac." Gen. xxxii. 9.

PROMISES TO GODLY PARENTS.

The promises of God in regard to this doctrine should be valued by godly parents as the greatest blessing that can befall them, next to their own salvation.

When you have children born unto you, then renew your covenant with God, and walk more obediently. God is to extend his covenant anew to your children for yourselves; do you, therefore, renew your covenant with him. And the more they increase, and the more children thou art in dependence upon God to extend his covenant unto, the larger do thou extend thy covenant-obedience, and to more duties. Search farther into the commandments to find out new ways to lay thyself forth in, as God gives thee more lives, give thou more lives

to him. Methuselah being born to Enoch, proved him to walk more exactly. Gen. v. 22. So you have many children should be much in obedience and ever for your children's sake walk so as to keep up the repute of being holy. Walk not doubtfully and unstably, so as there should arise any question of your godliness by the saints you live with. This even for your children's sakes; for you have seen what a help, what an encouragement, it may be to their faith, that you are accounted and known to be godly; when you shall walk so as to leave no doubt, (as Solomon did, who so lived that it was no question in the church whether he be saved or no) you then weaken all these encouragements of true faith, and all the arguments that should prove them to a holy life.

If you have children that are godly, you should then get your hearts exceedingly affected to God and love again. There is no outward mercy like this is more than if he had raised up one of thy children to be monarch of the whole world.

Are you to think your children elect? then direct them to that faith concerning them, and leave them to God. This comforted David when about to die, "though his house was not so with God," so he looked towards God, yet God had made a covenant with him for his own, and many others' salvation, though outwardly it did not prosper. God is thy friend and thy children's friend. He will remember thee when thou art dead, even as he oftentimes remembered David's. It is a comfort that thou canst leave them to a church, a mother, but a greater comfort that thou canst leave them to God as to a father.

Luther, being to make his last will, and having nothing to bequeath to his children, he bequeathed them to God: so do thou, and say as Christ when about to leave the world, "Thine, O Father, they were, and thou gavest them me;" and tell them

as he did, "I go to my Father and your Father." They that are godly are provided for; there is one who hath taken them off thy hand and care already; in the confidence thereof thou mayest die hopefully and quietly.

PARENTS SHOULD BE WITHOUT PARTIALITY.

Again, let parents be taught to take heed of undue partiality in their love towards any of their children. For the child whom thou neglectest may be he or she whom God loveth; and that child which thou favourest may be one God refused. While God reveals himself indefinitely, thou art to bear these affections towards each which a parent would have to an elect child, though thou canst not absolutely say it is holy.

God is no respecter of persons; neither be thou of thy children, so as to doat on one and neglect another. God has often, in the event, exceedingly checked the sins of parents in this way, and chosen cross to what their choice was. They have been for Esau, and God hath been for Jacob: they have been for a beautiful Absalom, and God hath been for Solomon. They have looked with fleshly eyes as Samuel did, and thought Eliab the child of election; and for him have all their prayers run, because of his countenance and stature; but God hath taught them not to look on the outward appearance: he hath been for David, whom they have set to keep their sheep. Eve had a promise of the Messiah, and she thought Cain the man in whom it should be fulfilled, who yet proved the eldest son of reprobation, and the murderer of his brother. But Abel, he was godly, and after him Seth, which shews that God judgeth not as man judgeth. Keep then an even balance with thy children; the child that pleaseth

not thy fancy and nature so well, is yet thy child; and it may be God's child too. God, peradventure, loves him for thy sake, and wilt not thou love him for God's sake?

Such as come not of godly parents and yet are godly themselves, and are parents, may be the foundation of a noble family. The first of their house, the first stone of a building to God.

DUTY OF THE CHURCH.

The churches of God ought to receive with special love and rejoicing, such of their members' children as prove godly. They are not strangers, but born in the house; the families of church members are our nurseries, and what a comfort is it to have the church replenished with scions fetched from thence; to build our houses with stones out of our own quarries! I may speak to every church in the words of God to the church of the Jews, "Thou shalt clothe thee with them, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee as a bride doth her attire," Isaiah xlix. 18, of her own weaving.

WILLIAM WISHEART.



THEOLOGIA ;

OR,

DISCOURSES OF GOD.

THE NECESSITY AND ADVANTAGE OF A KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S ATTRIBUTES.

BEING but poor finite creatures, our capacity is so weak and shallow, that we are not able to conceive of an infinite God as he is in himself. In this respect, " clouds and darkness are round about him ;" and " he dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto." Therefore he is pleased, in condescension to our weakness, to come, as it were, out of his inaccessible light, and to manifest himself to us by certain attributes, such as infinite power, wisdom, goodness, holiness, justice, &c. which are as so many rays of the divine perfections let down to us : and we have right conceptions of God, when we conceive of him according to these representations he hath made of himself to us.

The admirable goodness and condescension of God in giving such clear and full discoveries of himself

in his word and gospel, ought to engage all that live under the gospel, to make a diligent improvement of them, for informing their minds, and influencing their life and practice. That God should reveal himself, so clearly and fully, in and by his own Son, unto such as had brought themselves into woful darkness by their own sin and folly, what admirable grace and condescension is here! Especially, considering that it is of the greatest concernment to us, with respect to our eternal condition, to be brought by such discoveries to have right conceptions of God; and that he was no way obliged to make any revelation of himself unto us. He might for ever have locked up the treasures of his wisdom and prudence in his own eternal breast, and have left all the sons of men in that woful darkness into which they had cast themselves, and kept them under the chains and power of it, unto eternal judgment. Such therefore by whom these high discoveries of God in the gospel are neglected, as they will be left without excuse, so they are chargeable with the highest ingratitude to God, and a horrible contempt of his admirable grace and goodness, which cannot but expose them to his heavy wrath and indignation for evermore. It is therefore our duty and interest to improve these discoveries with all diligence, for furnishing our minds with such notions and conceptions of God, as are in some measure worthy of him, and suitable to the revelation he hath made of himself. But bare notions of God in the mind being but vain speculations, therefore it doth also highly concern us to improve the revelation God hath made of himself for bettering our notions and apprehensions of him, that they may not only fill the head, but also affect the heart, and make the life fruitful. This is that knowledge of God that gives the mind its perfection, and the soul its blessedness, and dispels our natural darkness, the removal whereof is the dawning of glory and

immortality. Therefore let us not please ourselves with any notions and conceptions of God, how much soever they may be raised and refined, but such as transform the soul into his image, and influence our life and practice, with respect to his worship and the whole of our obedience to him. The end of all gospel revelation is, to declare so much of God as is sufficient to be a bottom of our faith, love, and obedience, such as we are capable to perform in this imperfect state. He will make a far more high and bright discovery of himself, when he calls us to eternal contemplation, admiration, and praise.

It is the root of all true religion. The saving knowledge of God is the root of our happiness. Hence our blessed Lord says, in his prayer to the Father, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." It is the root of eternal life; a root that will spring up to the knowledge of God above, which is complete happiness. When this knowledge is planted in the heart, there is a work of grace begun, which will be carried on unto perfection. When we know God savingly, then we shall love him and long for him. Hence our Saviour says to the woman of Samaria, "If thou knewest the gift of God,—thou wouldest have asked of him." "They that know his name, will put their trust in him." It is the life of all religion. As it conveys life to the soul at first, and is therefore called "the light of life;" so it cherishes and promotes the spiritual life. It furthers the increase and exercise of all the graces of the Spirit in a gracious soul. Growth in grace is promoted by it. Hence the apostle exhorts us to "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." It is fuel to our love, to make it flame the more vehemently. Therefore the apostle prays for the Philippians, that their "love might yet abound more and more in knowledge." Fruitfulness

in every good work depends upon it. Hence they are joined together: "Being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." And the strength of grace is promoted by it: "for a man of knowledge increaseth strength." Practical knowledge enlivens and quickens the soul. It engages believers in the pursuit of more conformity and likeness to God: "We all," says the apostle, "with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image." Knowledge first begets love, and then love studies to draw the picture of the party beloved. This knowledge promotes humility: for the same light that discovers to the soul the glory and beauty of God, doth also discover to it its own vileness and filthiness. Again, it weans the heart from the world and all things here below. A sight of God's glory and beauty makes all the fancied glory and beauty of other things to disappear in the eye of the soul.

As in the first creation, the first creature that God made was *light*; so in the new creation, God's first work is the enlightening of the mind with the saving knowledge of himself. This blessing hath also a necessary connection with peace with God, access to him, and communication with him; for till we have "an heart to know him," we cannot seek peace with him, nor value and pursue after communion with him.

The saving knowledge of God warms the heart and affections toward God and Christ. This spiritual light cannot be without a spiritual heat. The light that shines in the head, kindles a love to God in the heart. It is said of the two disciples going to Emmaus, "Their eyes were opened, and their hearts burned within them." And the apostle tells us, "He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love." If the want of love to others, much more the want of love to God, is an argument that we do not know him

savingly. Such as know God savingly, have seen him in the light of his own Spirit, and have got such a discovery of his glory, excellency, and beauty, that their souls cannot choose but love him, and delight in him. Well then, what love have you to God? What desires after the enjoyment of him? What delight in your approaches to him? Doth your knowledge of God kindle desires, and holy affections, and heart-breakings for him? Alas, many pretend to know God, but they love other things better than him, and have more ardent desires after the world than ever they had after God. But if your knowledge of God warm your heart, and enliven and quicken your affections after God and Christ, then it is saving.

THE BEING OF GOD.

The being of God is an article both of our reason and of our faith. It is an article of our reason, as it shines forth to us in the creatures; and an article of faith, as it breaks forth upon us in the holy scriptures.

Some of you have, through grace, chosen God for your God and portion. Your hearts are set upon him, and your desires are carried out after him, and your delight is in him. You have taken him for your all, and resolved to seek all your happiness in him, and have counted all things but loss and dung for him. Now, it cannot but yield great satisfaction to you, to take a view of these convincing demonstrations, that reason affords of the being of that God whom your hearts have centered upon. O how refreshing must it be, to see every creature justify you, in your owning, choosing and adoring him!

Let me argue from the creation of Man. Man is the epitome of the world, and contains in himself the

substance of all natures. All the perfections of the several natures in the world are gathered and meet in him. In his soul he partakes of heaven ; in his body, of earth. In him is the life of plants, the sense of beasts, and the intellectual nature of angels. Particularly, 1. Consider the fabric of the body. It is formed like an admirable piece of architecture. We are "fearfully and wonderfully made." Man's body is curiously and cunningly wrought, with nerves, veins, arteries ; like a piece of embroidery or tapestry. Indeed the artificial structure of the body, the elegancy of all the several parts, the proper situation of them, their proportion one to another, and their fitness and usefulness for their several functions, do loudly proclaim the infinite goodness, power, and wisdom of the Creator, and that none but God could frame it. Add to all this, the great diversity of faces and features among men, without which there could be no government, no commerce, no preservation of property, nor execution of justice. 2. Consider the nature of the soul. The nobleness and excellence thereof, do plainly show that it is of a divine original : for it is spiritual and immortal. The soul is the greatest glory of the lower world. And, as one says, there seems to be no more difference between a soul and an angel, than between a sword in the scabbard, and when it is out of the scabbard. Consider the vastness of its capacity. It is suited to all objects, as the eye is to all colours. Consider also the swiftness of its motion. There is nothing so swift in the whole course of nature. The sun runs round the world in a day ; but the soul can run through the world in a moment, and on a sudden think of things that are a thousand miles distant. Certainly such a noble being cannot be the effect of any material cause. Such a spiritual nature must proceed from a higher Spirit than itself, and of a transcendent perfection above it. 3. Consider the

union of both. That such a noble being as the soul should be an inhabitant in such a tabernacle of clay ; that a body in itself as vile and dull as earth, and a soul of such a noble and active nature ; an earthly body, and an immaterial soul, should be linked together by such a strait union : this must needs be the effect of an infinite power. Who but a God could so closely unite such different substances ?

When we consider all this, we must own that there is a God that made us, and not we ourselves. We need go no further than ourselves to behold a God : so that we must flee from ourselves before we can put off the notions of a Deity.

Some men do what they can to smother their fears, while they wallow in sin, and spend their days in carnal mirth : yet there are hidden fears which they cannot altogether extinguish ; and these hidden fears are revived, whether they will or not, when the hand of God is upon them, or when they are alone, or when they are on the confines of eternity. Certainly these things prove the being of God : for they must needs arise from the secret sense of some Supreme Being, who knows and observes, and will call sinners to an account. So that God hath not left himself without a witness in men's own breasts. Yea, every man's conscience is as a thousand witnesses of the being of God.

There are in the soul insatiable desires after happiness, contentment, and satisfaction, which it cannot find in worldly things ; for it finds an imperfection in all things here, and is therefore, in the greatest affluence of worldly comforts and enjoyments, still pursuing after something else to content and satisfy it, and can never be at rest. Now, these desires argue that there is in the soul some notion of a perfect Being, that can content and satisfy it. And, indeed, if there were no such Being, the noblest creature in the world would be most miserable. For

other creatures obtain their ultimate desires ; they are filled with good : therefore, if there were nothing able to satisfy the vast desires of the soul, man would be in a worse condition than other creatures. Seeing the soul cannot rest but in that which is infinite, there must be something infinite for it to rest in.

GOD'S INCOMPREHENSIBILITY.

We cannot have a full and comprehensive knowledge of God in this life, because of our incapacity. Though the ocean hath water enough to fill the largest vessel, yet it can communicate no more to it than the vessel is capable to contain : so here, there is enough in God to fill the largest understanding, but our capacity is very shallow. You may exceed all other subjects in your expressions and apprehensions of them ; but here is a subject wherein there can be no excess : yea, there is no access to it ; for he " dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto." The mind is much more comprehensive than words ; yet our minds are too narrow to conceive him. Even the heart of a Solomon, though enlarged as the sand on the sea-shore, was not large enough for the great God. " Canst thou by searching find out God ? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection ? It is as high as heaven, what canst thou do ? Deeper than hell, what canst thou know ? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." God is sometimes said to " dwell in light," to show the greatness of his majesty ; and sometimes he is said to " dwell in darkness," to show our weakness and incapacity to apprehend him as he is in himself. " He made darkness his secret place," says the psalmist ; " his pavilion round about him was dark waters." The eye of the soul can no

more look upon the dazzling brightness of God, than a man can look stedfastly on the sun shining in his strength. The abundance of that inaccessible light, bearing no proportion to our understanding, doth so dazzle the eye of the soul, that it becomes as darkness to it. When the eye of the soul is fixed in the contemplation of that shining and glorious Majesty, his inaccessible light is, by reason of our weakness, that glorious and resplendent darkness that blinds us so that we cannot look on him. In this sense, "clouds and darkness are round about him." Though he be not far from us, yet he is far above us, and far beyond us; far above our thoughts, and beyond our conceptions.

Let me show you whence it is that our capacity, to conceive of God, is so shallow in this imperfect state. Take these reasons or causes of it. 1. There is a cloud of sin upon the eye of the soul; a thick mist upon the understanding. Believers themselves are not perfectly cured of their natural blindness. There are still thick scales upon our eyes, and too much of the vail upon our hearts: so that it is with believers as with a man that hath sore eyes; he cannot see so clearly as another whose eyes are whole and sound. 2. The soul is clogged with fleshly clay. The motions of the body, by reason of its weakness and infirmities, do greatly obstruct the operations of the soul: so that it is with the soul as with a man that is shut up in a dark room; the light shines in only through some holes and rifts; but though the sun shine never so brightly, yet he cannot see the glory of it: so, while we are shut up in this dungeon of flesh, we cannot see the glory of God. When the soul tries the wing, and flutters toward heaven, it is presently pulled down again by this earthly clay that we carry about with us. 3. Corrupt and turbulent affections do oftentimes confound the eye of the soul. As Hagar could not see the well that was before her,

by reason of her passion and grief, till God opened her eyes : so we are oftentimes blinded with passions, love and fear, desire and anger, or some cloud interposing from the passions, so that we cannot see God and the things of God so clearly. 4. In this imperfect state, our apprehensions of things take their rise from sense and sensible things. Our poor narrow minds are, as it were, immersed and drowned in bodies of clay ; so that we cannot think of things without some corporeal representations. Hence it is that we are not able to conceive of God as he is : for although we labour to refine and spiritualize our thoughts of God, and aim at more raised and abstracted conceptions of his majesty, by separating that which is bodily from that which is spiritual ; yet even when we frame the highest notions of God, there is still some similitude of some corporeal thing in our fancy, and some dregs of matter sticking to our conceptions of him ; so that we cannot frame any suitable pure notion of his abstracted nature.

The most enlarged capacity of the glorified saints, shall not be large enough to comprehend all his glory. Therefore that manifestation of the glory of God in heaven, must be proportioned to the capacity of the creature, else it would confound and not satisfy. God must infinitely condescend, even in heaven itself, and accommodate the appearances of his glory to the apprehensions of poor finite creatures. The saints in heaven shall know God perfectly, so far as creatures are capable to know him : yet they shall not know him to perfection. They shall then see and know so much of God as will make them perfectly happy : but to know him to perfection is more than comes to the share of the happiness of any creature.

Is it so that God is unsearchable and incomprehensible ? Then there is an unseen evil in sin : more *evil* than any man ever knew or saw. Certainly the

evil of sin must be infinite, incomprehensible, and inconceivable, in regard of the object against whom it is committed. An injury, which being done to an ordinary man, is but a breach of good behaviour, may be high treason, if done against a king or prince. The dignity and excellence of the object doth exceedingly aggravate the offence. O then, of what a horrid nature must sin be, seeing it is an offence and injury done, not to earthly kings and princes, not to glorious angels, but to an incomprehensible Majesty who "cannot be found out unto perfection?" The venom and malignity of sin must needs be inconceivably great; because God, who is offended, wronged, and dishonoured by it, is inconceivably excellent, infinitely above all that we can speak or think. And upon this ground, I can aver, that there is more evil in the least sin, than can be conceived or comprehended by all angels and men. In heaven, when the saints shall "see God face to face, and know him as they are known of him," then they shall have more full and clear apprehensions of the evil of sin, than they can have now, which will greatly lighten their joy and thankfulness, and admiration of divine grace; yet even then shall they not be able to comprehend the great evil that is in sin; because their most enlarged capacity will not be large enough, to comprehend the matchless excellency and glorious perfections of God, who was offended and dishonoured by it. O then, never entertain slight thoughts of sin any more.

Though God be incomprehensible, yet we should not give over the study of the knowledge of him. Though we cannot comprehend him, nor find him out unto perfection; yet this will not excuse men's sloth and negligence, as if it were in vain to study to know him. We must not sit down where we are, because we cannot go so far as we would. As we should labour to "know the love of Christ," though

it be so vast and boundless that it " passeth knowledge : " so should we labour to know God, though he pass all created understandings. We should study to know the greatness of his power, love, mercy, &c. though his greatness in all these be such as our narrow hearts cannot comprehend. We should aim at and endeavour after perfection in the knowledge of God, as well as in grace, though we cannot attain to either.

For clearing this, consider that there is some knowledge of God attainable in this life, though not a perfect nor comprehensive knowledge. Though he cannot be known as he is in himself, yet he may be known so far as is needful for our salvation and comfort. You may know him, so far as concerns your duty to him, and your happiness in him. You may know him, so far, as out of love to him, and fear of him, to worship and serve him ; and so far as to admire and adore his incomprehensible majesty, and to see that there is no happiness but in the enjoyment of him. This is all the knowledge of God that is promised in this life, and all we can attain unto. And even with respect to this knowledge, none know so much of God, but they may know more, and know him better, and to better purpose. And though we cannot know all of God, yet we are bound to study all that may be known.

Well then, let not the consideration of God incomprehensibility discourage you in studying the knowledge of him. It must not quench your endeavours, but regulate them, and keep them compass. You must not lie by, but press earnestly after the knowledge of God, as he hath revealed himself. And let all your inquiries after the knowledge of God bear a special relation to this that you may fear, reverence, and adore his glorious majesty, and that you may worship and him, and your hearts may go out after him

matchless and incomparable portion. Whatever you know of God is but a vain speculation, if it hath no tendency this way.

GOD'S KNOWLEDGE.

Let us reverence, honour, and adore the great God, on account of this glorious and admirable perfection. We use to pay a great veneration to men of great knowledge; and shall we not much more honour and reverence the great God, for his infinite and incomprehensible knowledge? Is it not a great perfection to know and foreknow, not only the works, but also the thoughts, purposes, and designs of any one man? But how much greater must it be, to know and foreknow all the secret practices, designs, thoughts and contrivances, of all the men that have been, are, or shall be, in all parts of the world! God's foreknowledge is most admirable. Prophets have been in all ages and nations held in great veneration: how much more should God's infinite foreknowledge of all things render him venerable and honourable in our eyes! Let us then admire this perfection in God, and adore him for it.

Get a deep sense of God's knowledge upon your heart, that you may live and walk always as in his sight. To this the Lord exhorts Abraham, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." And the saints have done so. David "set the Lord always before him." And it was the psalmist's resolution to "walk before the Lord in the land of the living." Even the heathen could say that "we ought to live so as in his sight." There ought to be frequent thoughts of God's knowledge, that the sense of it may be deeply impressed upon our hearts.

For direction in this matter, 1. Believe God's omniscience, and believe it firmly. Labour to have the

faith of it well rooted in your hearts. Many who profess to believe that God sees and knows all things, have only a dead opinion of it, which is easily taken up. Therefore labour to have a sound and lively faith of it. Such a faith is the gift of God ; therefore go to him for it : and study the reasons and grounds on which his omniscience is built. Certainly, he that made us, and is ever present with us, and leads us by the hand wherever we go, must needs see and know all that we do. 2. Think often of this divine perfection, and think of it deeply and seriously. This is the way to have the sense of it deeply imprinted on the heart. God takes it kindly, when our minds are employed in thinking of him and his glorious perfections. He hath "a book of remembrance" for those that "think upon his name." 3. Look upon God not only as your Witness, but also as your Judge. Remember that as he sees and knows all, so he "will bring every thing to judgment." It is to him you must give an account. The thoughts of this will render the sense of his omniscience the more operative and effectual. Solomon tells us, "A king that sitteth on the throne of judgment, scattereth away all evil with his eyes." Will a subject break the laws in sight of his sovereign? Will malefactors perpetrate villanies when their judge is looking on? So, shall we affront "the Judge of all the earth" to his face? Remember, that God sees wickedness, that he may avenge it: "He beholds mischief and spite to requite it with his hand."

In prayer, we come to speak to God ; in the word we come to hear God speak to us ; in the Lord's Supper, we come to be feasted at his table. Not all this is but an empty formality, unless we have sense of his omniscience and all-seeing eye. Therefore, before every duty of worship, let us open the curtain, and present God to ourselves as the searcher of hearts, and think that we go before him that

and knows us. 1. This will quicken to preparation, that we may bring nothing before God but what is becoming his majesty. And we may judge of the suitableness of our preparation, by the depth of such impressions on us. 2. It will be a good mean to keep the heart right in worship. The neglect of it is the cause why men are so slight and formal, so customary and careless in their worship. But serious thoughts of God's all-seeing eye will be a means to prevent these evils, and give check to wandering and distracting thoughts. It would make us serious and intent, and inspire us with life and vigour, and engage us to behave ourselves with that reverence and awfulness that becomes the divine Majesty. Therefore let us remember that we come before him that searcheth the heart, and whose eyes are as a flame of fire; and let us set ourselves as in his sight. Particularly, let us do so, 1. In prayer. The psalmist begins his prayer with some thoughts of this: "Unto thee I lift up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens." He thought of him as one sitting above, and beholding all that is here below. O it is an awful thought, when we speak to God, that all our affections, desires, and aims, are naked and open to his eyes. In prayer, we beg that his "eyes may be opened to behold" us, as well as his ear attentive to hear us. All our faith and comfort, as well as seriousness, in prayer, depends on the belief and consideration of his, that God sees and knows all. 2. In hearing the word. Let us lift up our hearts, and set God before us, and say, "We are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." We ought to be seriously attentive, as if God himself did speak to us by oracles. 3. In the Lord's supper. All the internal work is immediately transacted between God and our souls; therefore look on him as present that sees and knows all.

To you who are the children of God, and have

a special covenant-interest in him and relation to him, the doctrine of God's omniscience affords you ground of strong consolation, in divers cases. As,

1. Under spiritual desertion, and groundless apprehensions of being neglected or forgotten by God. The children of God are sometimes haunted with this temptation, that God hath forgotten them, and doth not look after them, nor take notice of what concerns them; as if he did not mind that there is such a man in the world. Hence the church cries out, "My Lord hath forsaken me, and my God hath forgotten me:" and the psalmist, "Why hast thou forgotten me?" And God reprehends this in his people, "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, my way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God." But in this case, it may comfort you who are the children of God, that you are not unknown to him. He knows the persons of all his own. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. He knows his sheep by name." Hence he says to Moses, "I know thee by name." He knows you by name and surname. As he foreknew you from eternity, so he cannot be ignorant of you in time. And he cannot forget you. Hence he says to his church, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she would not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget; yet will I not forget thee. Behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands. Your names are written in the Lamb's book of life." Christ says of the sparrows, "Not one of them is forgotten before God." And are his own children forgotten? He knows and remembers you in this world, to care for and look after you, to pardon your iniquities, heal your diseases, strengthen you under temptations, guide you in your difficulties, preserve you in dangers, and to

perform all things for you: and he will remember you at last, to raise you out of your graves, to gather you to himself, and to reward you according to his promise.

2. Here is matter of comfort in secret prayer. God sees and knows your prayers, though never so secret. How comfortable is it, that you do not call upon a deaf and ignorant idol, but upon a God of infinite knowledge, who can discern your particular cry, though crowded by a multitude of cries from others; as Christ discerned the believing touch of a poor woman from the press of the thronging multitude? Again, when you are at a loss how to express yourselves in prayer; yet God knows and understands your sighs and groans; he knows what is the mind and meaning of the Spirit in them. So the apostle tells us, "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered: and he that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit." How doth David cheer himself with this: "O Lord," says he, "my groaning is not hid from thee." And he hears your tears, the voice of your weeping; and reserves your tears in his bottle. Again, your present condition may be such, that you cannot pray in any good order and method, but your prayers are full of distraction and confusion: yet God understands the meaning of them, and knows how to distinguish between what is yours and what is his, in your prayers. He sees and knows the frame of your hearts in prayer, if they be meek, humble, and broken; and he judges of your prayers by that, and not by external enlargements. Again, when in prayer you forget any thing which at first you intended; yet God knows the mind of the Spirit, and therefore will put that in your prayers for you, which you forgot to put in yourselves. He hears your desires, though they be not formally expressed in prayer. Hence the

psalmist says, " Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the humble : " and, " Lord, all my desire is before thee." And he knows all your wants and necessities, though you have not expressed them : " Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him."

THE WISDOM OF GOD.

The wisdom of God doth chiefly appear in our redemption by Christ. When man had ruined himself by sin, the wisdom of men and angels could never have devised any possible way of salvation. But when this puzzled and nonplussed all finite understandings, infinite wisdom found out the way, to wit, that the eternal Son of God should assume our nature, and by his obedience and sufferings in that nature, satisfy divine justice, and purchase for us all spiritual and eternal blessings ; and that we should be interested in all this by faith in him. Here is a conjunction of excellent ends and excellent means. As there cannot be a more noble end, than the glory of God in the salvation of lost sinners ; so there cannot be a more admirable means than God manifest in the flesh. This is " the wisdom of God in a mystery : " a thing more sublime than all the secrets in the creation. Here death is made the way to life, and shame the way to glory, and the cross the way to the crown ; so that the rare contrivance is admirable. The very angels desire to pry into this mystery. Yet are they not able to search it to the bottom, or to tell over the treasures of wisdom which are in it. Here the treasures of wisdom are opened. Hence, Christ is called " the wisdom of God." Here is a " hidden wisdom," and " wisdom in a mystery." The wisdom of God in redemption is truly mysterious and incomprehensible. The wisdom of men and angels is not

able to unfold it. It is a wisdom as manifold as mysterious. Hence it is called "the manifold wisdom of God." There is a variety in this mystery, and a mystery in every part of the variety. The word in the original rendered *manifold*, denoteth a thing that hath a curious variety in it, like a piece of embroidery. The wisdom of God in redemption is an embroidered wisdom, wherein there is all variety of rich and curious contrivances.

Get an interest in this God as your God. Let this commend him to you, that he is "the only wise God." O what a happiness will it be to have him for your God! When he is your God, he will then be yours in all the glorious perfections of his nature, and particularly in this of his wisdom. His wisdom will be yours, to conduct you through all difficulties, to out-wit all your spiritual enemies, to give you all that you need in due season, and to guide you safe to glory at last. If left to yourselves, you will ruin and undo yourselves: but, O what a happiness is it to be under the conduct and guidance of infinite wisdom? Therefore let it be your great business to get him for your God. And, for this end choose him for your God in Christ; for as he cannot be yours but by your own choice, so you cannot have him for your God but in and through the blessed Mediator. And if you would have the Lord for your God, you must be content to take him for your guide, and say to him, "My Father, thou art the guide of my youth." As he will not be your God, so you do not own him as such, unless you take him for your guide. "For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death."

Study to be like God in wisdom. Our blessed Lord exhorts, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father who is in heaven is perfect." We should study to resemble God in all his imitable perfections, and particularly in his wisdom. Seek true wisdom,

that you may be like God. But seek chiefly after holy and spiritual wisdom, that wisdom which is from above, heavenly wisdom, to be wise unto salvation, and wise unto that which is good. In this you will most resemble God. When you propose to yourselves the most noble and worthy end, the glorifying God and the enjoyment of him; and choose the most fit and proper means for attaining that end, taking God's word for your rule and directory; and are vigorous and earnest in pursuing the means for that end: this is that holy and heavenly wisdom by which you will most resemble the infinitely wise God. That is true wisdom, to be diligent and laborious in the work of your salvation, to be careful and punctual in your obedience to God. Hence Moses exhorts the children of Israel, "Keep therefore and do these statutes; for this is your wisdom." This is God's voice to the children of men, as Job hath told us: "And unto man he said, Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding." The preacher tells us, "That a wise man's heart is at his right hand." The right hand is the chief instrument of action: so that the plain meaning is, a wise man is hard at work, diligent and laborious in the great work that God hath given him to do.

How comfortable is it that "the only wise God" is your God? His wisdom is made over to you by covenant. Being infinitely wise he hath many ways for bringing to pass his gracious designs toward you. Particularly the consideration of God's infinite wisdom may comfort you in these cases.

1. In all your difficulties and perplexities, when you are at a loss in your own thoughts, and know not what to do, or what way to take. You have an infinitely wise God to direct and guide you. He hath engaged himself by promise so to do: "The meek will he guide in judgment; and the meek will he

teach his way :” and, “ the Lord shall guide thee continually.” And as he hath promised to be your guide, so he hath infinite wisdom to fit and qualify him for it. There are rocks on every hand upon which you are ready to make shipwreck : but how comfortable is it that you are under the conduct of infinite wisdom !

2. Under afflictions. God’s management of the rod is directed by infinite wisdom. He knows when to bring on affliction, and when to remove it again. He knows how to time your crosses, and how to measure out your comforts. And he is wise to make “ all things work together for good ” to you, and to extract good out of evil ? He can make these afflictions which destroy your outward comforts, consume your inward defilements. He can bring the glory of your salvation out of the depths of a seeming ruin.

THE POWER OF GOD.

Power is an excellence belonging to the divine nature. Indeed it is essential to the conception of God : we cannot conceive him God, if we do not conceive him most powerful. He is not God, if he cannot do what he will. We cannot conceive God without a power suitable to his nature and essence : therefore his essence being infinite, he must also be infinite in power.

If we search our own hearts to the bottom, we shall find that it is the power of God we often doubt of, rather than his will ; and seeming doubts of his will are but pretences to cover our shameful doubts of his power. A plain evidence of this is, that doubts do not haunt us but in cases of danger and difficulty. Further, it is certain that God knows our hearts much better than we do ourselves : now, in the holy scrip-

tures he still represents men as doubting of his power. Sarah doubted of God's power to perform his promise, as is plainly implied in what the Lord saith to Abraham, "Wherefore did Sarah laugh?—Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" Moses also doubted of God's power to give the people flesh to eat, when he says to the Lord, "Thou hast said I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them to suffice them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them to suffice them?" And to this the Lord answers, "Is the Lord's hand waxed short?" So that even Moses was overtaken with this kind of unbelief, after all the experiments he had of God's miraculous acts: God's answer to him plainly shows that this was at the bottom. The children of Israel, in the wilderness, did also disbelieve the power of God; "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" say they; "Can he give bread? Can he provide flesh for his people?" And when Christ came to raise Lazarus from the dead, Martha says, "Lord, by this time he stinketh:" as if it passed the power of God to raise him up. From all which we see that even believers in Christ are apt to question the power of God in hard and difficult cases.

But let it be considered that it is a great sin to question the power of God. It is to deny or question his deity, and to pull him out of his throne. Therefore God takes it ill when men limit his power. He complains of this in the children of Israel, and for this he takes up Moses short. It is most dishonourable and displeasing to God, and deprives people of the favours he designed for them, as we see in the children of Israel, when they questioned his power; "The Lord heard it and was wroth; so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel." And when in a time of great scarcity, the prophet foretold a sudden plenty in

Samaria, a certain Lord answered, and said, "Behold if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be:" for this a sad doom was passed upon him by the prophet; and accordingly he lived to see his belief confuted, and then was trodden to death.

The power of God is the great foundation of trust. There are three foundations of trust, God's mercy in making the promise; his truth, in minding to make good the promise; and his power, in the accomplishment of it: or, as an old father expresseth it, 'The readiness of grace, the truth of the promise, and the power of performance.' But especially the truth and power of God are the two great supporters of faith. Sarah's faith, and Abraham's faith, do well together. Sarah relied upon the truth and faithfulness of God; "she judged him faithful who had promised:" and Abraham relied upon the power of God; "being fully persuaded, that what God had promised, he was able also to perform." The truth of God is the warrant of our faith; but his power to make good the promise is the proper ground and foundation of it. Hence faith on God is called a "trusting on his arm." His mercy could not succour us, nor his goodness relieve us, nor his wisdom guide us, nor his truth make good the promises to us, without his power: so that there can be no trusting in God, without an eye to his power. Therefore, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose faith was tried above most of the saints before or after them, had this attribute displayed to them for the support of their faith: "God appeared unto them by the name of God Almighty."

Improve the consideration of God's almighty power, to encourage you to prayer, and to strengthen your faith in it. It is certainly a great encouragement that in prayer we go to a God of infinite power, one who hath all power in his hand, and is able to

do what we ask of him, yea, "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Therefore the Lord's Prayer is concluded with a doxology of God's power; "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory." This is the great encouragement: as God hath a kingdom, and possesseth all blessings; so he hath power to confer these blessings on us. Hence, our blessed Lord built his confidence in prayer upon this foundation: "He offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death." And the saints consider the power of God, to strengthen their faith in prayer; as the prophet, "Ah, Lord God, behold thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched-out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee." And, says Jehoshaphat, "O Lord God, in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?" And the church pleads with God, to act "according to the greatness of his power." We cannot pray in faith of success, unless we believe and consider the power of God: yea, without this we shall soon be weary of prayer. Who would address himself to one that is not able to help? When a poor subject cried to a mortal king, "Help, my lord, O king;" he answered, "Whence shall I help thee?" What heart could we have to go to a God that cannot help? There is more hope of help from one that is unwilling, than from one that is unable. I add, that the power of God is the great foundation of faith and trust; and it is in prayer that faith is particularly to be acted.

When conscience is awakened, the sense of inveterate and rooted distempers and corruptions raiseth great fears, so that the soul is apt to entertain despairing thoughts: 'How is it possible that this stubborn will can be subdued, or this hard heart softened, or this vain mind made serious, or these

bewitching lusts renounced?' The soul apprehends a mighty difficulty in parting with sin. Such is the perverseness of your natures, the power of your corruptions, and the strength of your spiritual distempers, that your conversion appears to you to be impossible; O how shall it ever be accomplished? But here is that which may answer all your doubts and fears; God is able to overcome your stubborn nature, to overpower your strong corruptions, to subdue your boisterous lusts, and to bring down the strong holds of sin. All this is easy to a God of infinite power. How shall the Jews be converted? The apostle answers, "God is able to graft them in again." God can "raise and quicken the dead." When our blessed Lord told his disciples of the difficulty of a rich man's salvation, "they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?" But he answered, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." We read of the "exceeding greatness of God's power toward them that believe." There is a mighty power exerted in the conversion and regeneration of sinners, and turning them from sin to God. The consideration of this may afford no small relief to poor sensible sinners: what cannot this mighty power do for you? How easily can the Almighty God vanquish all resistance made in your heart against the power of his grace? And when you are persuaded of his power, this may give you some hope of his will also; so that you may go to God, and say, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."

THE HOLINESS OF GOD.

Holiness is a chief and super-eminent perfection of God; that wherein the divine excellence doth chiefly consist. Therefore it is the most frequent

epithet given to his name in scripture. We never read *mighty name*, or *wise name*, but frequently *holy name*. This is his greatest title of honour; that wherein the divine Majesty is most illustrious. The holiness of God is his *glory* and *beauty*. Therefore he is said to be "glorious in holiness." He is *mighty* in power, and *rich* in grace, but *glorious* in holiness. It renders him glorious in himself, and glorious to all that understand what holiness is. It is the most beautiful perfection of God. Power is his arm, omniscience his eye, mercy his bowels, grace his riches; but holiness is his beauty. Hence it is said, "They praised the beauty of holiness." Therefore the holiness of God is the attribute that he delights most to honour: he will have the mouths of angels and saints filled with the praises of it. The seraphims, and the four beasts, praise his holiness, saying, "Holy, holy, holy." We do not find any other attribute so often repeated: it is never said, Wise, wise, wise; or Merciful, merciful, merciful. Hence it is also that God singles out this attribute to swear by, as if he were more concerned for the honour of it than of all the rest: "Once have I sworn by my holiness, that I will not lie unto David."

The divine holiness appears in the manifestations of his mercy, favour, and kindness to his people, who have a stamp of his holiness upon them. Hereby he manifests his love to and delight in holiness and holy persons. Therefore, when the psalmist blesses God for all his benefits, he takes particular notice of this divine perfection. "Bless the Lord, O my soul," says he, "and all that is within me bless thy holy name." Intimating that God had manifested his holiness in his kind and merciful dealings with him. Particularly God's giving gracious returns and answers to the prayers of his people is a fruit of his holiness. Therefore, when the psalmist had declared him to be "holy in all his works," he gives this particular

instance, "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him." And Hannah, having had a favourable return to her prayer, celebrates this divine perfection in my text, "There is none holy as the Lord." Again, the holiness of God is manifest in delivering his people in trouble and danger, and in avenging wrongs done to them. Therefore, when God had delivered his people, and destroyed their enemies in the Red Sea, Moses praises his holiness: "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, amongst the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness?" In a word, all God's acts of love, mercy, and kindness, to his people, are manifestations of his holiness. Hence it is a part of Mary's song, "He that is mighty hath done to me great things, and holy is his name."

We may hence be instructed about the great evil of sin. It is against the divine holiness; so that it is not only contrary to our interests, but to the very nature of God. All sin aims in general at the being of God, but especially at the holiness of his being. Some sins are more directly against one divine perfection, and some against another; but all sins agree together in their enmity against the holiness of God, which is the peculiar glory of the Deity. Hence, when Sennacherib's sin is aggravated, the Holy Spirit takes the rise from this perfection: "Against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? Even against the holy One of Israel." And God cannot but hate that which is directly opposite to the glory of his nature, and the lustre and varnish of all his other perfections. Now, what a horrid evil must that be, that is so contrary to the nature of God, that it is infinitely detested and abhorred by him! Oh, how little of the evil of sin is seen or understood even by the best of men!

Love God for his holiness. True it is, you should love him for his goodness, mercy, patience, and all

his other perfections ; for these also render him an amiable object : but love him chiefly for his holiness. It is not enough to love him because he is good and gracious to you, but you must love him also because he is holy in himself. It is chiefly his holiness that renders him amiable to himself ; therefore this chiefly should render him lovely to you. Love to him for his holiness and purity is necessary to prove and make out the sincerity of your love. Corrupt nature inclines us the quite contrary way. Unrenewed men hate God especially for his holiness. They have a great aversion from him on the account thereof ; and cannot endure any stamp or impress of this divine perfection. They hate his people because of their holiness ; and they cannot be reconciled to his laws, because they are so pure and holy ; and they secretly wish in their hearts that God were not so holy, and that his laws were not so strict, and that he might approve of their way, and not hate their sins. I say then, that wicked men hate God especially for his holiness : therefore it will be a good evidence of the sincerity of your love, when you love God chiefly because he is a holy God, and because he cannot but be displeased at sin which is so contrary to his holy nature and will. But how shall we know if we love God for his holiness ? If so, then you will love it in every stamp and impression thereof. You will love his law, not only for its usefulness to you, but chiefly for its innate purity and holiness, as the Psalmist did. " Thy word," says he, " is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it " And you will love his people, not only because of your own interest in them, or for any benefit you have by them, but chiefly because you see a stamp of the divine holiness upon them.

Study to be like God in holiness ; to be " partakers of his holiness." Pursue after a conformity to him therein. We have natures that are prone to

imitate, and are much led by example. Commands may be more instructive, but examples are more attractive. Therefore such as would excel in any art or science, propose unto themselves the most excellent in that kind for their pattern. Now, in our endeavours after holiness, what can be more attractive of our imitation than the holiness of God, which is the original and spring of all holiness in the creature? Therefore, it is not the holiness of the best men, nor the holiness of angels or archangels, that is proposed by the Spirit of God, as the chief and first object of our imitation, but the holiness of God. Hence the apostle exhorts, "As he who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation: because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy."

All men desire to be like God in glory and blessedness, but not in grace and holiness. Satan's temptation to our first parents was, "Ye shall be as gods;" not in a holy conformity, but in a self-sufficiency, which for a creature to aspire after is a cursed thing. But that which I bring to you is no temptation, but a remedy to recover the loss you sustained by that first temptation. By our fall in Adam, we lost the image, favour, and fellowship of God. By losing his image, we lost his favour; and by losing his favour we lost his fellowship. Therefore the way to recover his favour and fellowship, is first to recover his image. This is that which I am now exhorting you unto. Labour to recover what you lost in Adam; to have the image of God's holiness stamped upon your hearts and lives; "to be holy as God is holy."

THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

When Moses desired to see the glory of God, he tells him, " I will make all my goodness pass before thee." And by his goodness, we are to understand the train of his relative perfections springing from his goodness; as appears from the proclamation of his name, which was the performance of that he had promised. All the acts of divine grace, mercy, long-suffering, &c. are the effluxes of his goodness, distinguished by several names, according to the object about which it is exercised. When it supplies the indigent, it is *bounty*; when it relieves the miserable it is *mercy*; when it confers blessings on the unworthy, it is *grace*; when it bears long with rebellious sinners, it is *long-suffering*; when it bestows blessings on them to whom he hath obliged himself by promise, it is *truth*; and when it succours the innocent, and, by just punishment, restrains their evils that are destructive to men, it is *justice and righteousness*. It renders his other attributes amiable and delightful to us. Whatever comfort they yield to the hearts of believers, it is all owing to his goodness. This makes his wisdom contrive, and his power to act for us, and veils his holiness from affright us. It is this attribute that sets the rest on for our good. So that this is the most pleasant perfection of the divine nature. It is the great inviting bounty. We admire God for his other attributes and perfections; but this allures and draws in our hearts to him. For this we love him, and make ourselves to him. His goodness is a strong invitation to come to him for all we need. The great object of all our converse with him, is that he is God. Hence an old father says, 'The chief attribute which we conceive of God is his goodness.'

The goodness of God is gloriously manifest

our redemption by Christ. The whole of redemption is wrapped up in that one expression, "Good will towards men." O what astonishing goodness was it for God to give his only begotten Son to the death, for such vile rebels and enemies as we all are by nature? The goodness of God, under the name of his love, is rendered as the only cause of our redemption by Christ. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." This *So* is inexpressible; a *So* that all the angels in heaven cannot conceive or understand the dimensions of. God gave Christ for us, to commend his love, and to set it off with an admirable lustre. "God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." O what an expensive goodness was this! What cost was infinite goodness at for our redemption!

The goodness of God will be most signally manifested at the great day, when he will bountifully reward his people. It is in consideration of this especially that the psalmist cries out, "O how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee." It is "laid up" in heaven. And, O, who can tell how great goodness is laid up there! For "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." There is much goodness laid out upon believers in this life; but there is much more laid up for them in heaven. God communicates his goodness to them in this life, but scantily and sparingly; so that their most refreshing experiences of it are but "the first fruits," some small beginning of the glory that is to come. All that they get here is but a taste or sip of his goodness; but in heaven they shall have the full draughts, even as much as they can hold. Hence it is that the saints "long" and "groan earnestly" for their heavenly state. All that they get here doth not satisfy

their longing, but rather provoke their appetite for the full feast of glory. As the most eminent saints in this life are but narrow-mouthed vessels and of small capacity; so the means in and by which God communicates his goodness to them, are like narrow conduits from a full fountain: the ordinances cannot convey all the goodness of God to them. But in heaven, God will be "all in all," and will do his work by himself. There the narrowness of the means shall not straiten him, nor the weakness of the vessel hinder him, to communicate his goodness fully. Here we enjoy God but at second or third hand, in ordinances and providences: but there God shall communicate himself immediately, and therefore in a greater latitude and fulness than now. Here we get a little in this ordinance, and a little in that ordinance; though that little be sometimes as much as we can hold. But in heaven God will be "all in all," and we shall be filled with all the fullness of God. There every vessel shall be filled to the brim, and we shall hunger and thirst no more.

Labour to get a deep sense of the goodness of God upon your hearts. This will be of great advantage to you. It will quicken you to duty, and encourage your addresses to God, and enlarge your desires and expectations. It will promote thankfulness, and humble you for your unkindness and ingratitude to God. Therefore labour to have your hearts deeply possessed with a sense of the divine goodness. And entertain large thoughts of it. It greatly concerns you to look to it, what picture you draw of him in your minds. O, do not entertain hard thoughts of him, as if he were harsh and severe, or of a sparingly and envious nature. No, he is a good Samaritan. Meditate much upon his goodness, as it is displayed in all his works, and especially in the glorious work of redemption; and let your thoughts be deeply ponderous. Observe how freely God commu-

his goodness every day, even to the most undeserving and ill-deserving creatures. This is work both pleasant and profitable. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things; even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord."

That which is good is lovely and amiable. Now, God is the chief good, perfectly good, infinitely good; therefore he is most worthy of your love, and should be loved with a superlative love, above all other things. His goodness renders him beautiful, and his beauty renders him lovely. Therefore both are joined together in my text, "How great is his goodness! And how great is his beauty!" You cannot love God as he deserves: but you should love him as you can, and lament that you love him no better. Prefer his glory above all that is dear to you; and be ready to part with all things for him. The blessings and benefits you have received from him solicit your love. There is an obligation on every man's nature to answer bounty with love. But you should love him especially for the goodness and excellency of his own nature. This is to love God for himself.

THE PATIENCE OF GOD.

Patience is so necessary a perfection of God, that the glory of his other perfections would be much obscured without it. Were it not for his patience, how could his wisdom be glorified in bringing good out of evil, and so much good out of so great an evil as sin is? If he presently executed deserved wrath upon the enemies of the church, how would his power be glorified, in preserving his people in the hot furnace of affliction? And how would his wisdom in contriving, and his power in accomplishing their deliverance, be visible and conspicuous to the world?

And without the exercise of patience, how could the equity of his justice be manifest and unquestionable? If he were not patient toward sinners, he might seem to be cruel to them.

When God actually restrains his anger, and forbears deserved punishment, this is his patience in the exercise of it. Hence we may see a difference between God's patience and his mercy; patience spares the sinner, and mercy relieves him in his misery. So that patience comes in, as it were, between justice and mercy. 1. It silences justice. Hence is that expression, "I kept silence." I did not speak unto thee in my wrath. The justice of God is his sword, and patience is as it were the sheath of it. Therefore when the time of God's patience is expired, he is said "to draw forth his sword out of its sheath." 2. It ushers in mercy, and prepares the way for the exercise thereof. Therefore it is placed in the first rank: "The Lord is long-suffering and of great mercy." There would be no place for mercy, if patience did not prepare the way. He "waits that he may be gracious." Patience spares the sinner, that mercy may relieve him.

Of all the other perfections of the divine nature, this perfection of patience hath the shortest time wherein to act its part. The power of God will be exerted in the world to come, in punishing the damned, in upholding the new heaven and earth, and the rational creatures in their beings. His goodness and mercy have a heaven, and his justice and holiness a hell, wherein to display themselves to eternity: but his patience hath no other stage but this world whereon to act. After this world is at an end, it will remain shut up in the deity, without any further operation. The time of this life is the only time of long-suffering.

God exerciseth patience to manifest and show forth his gracious, merciful, and reconcilable nature.



For this end he exercised so much patience and long-suffering toward Paul, "that in him Christ Jesus might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them that should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." That is, that he might be a pattern of Christ's patience to other sinners; to let them understand, that neither the greatness nor the multitude of their sins should be a bar to his mercy and grace, if they would believe on his name. He exerciseth great patience toward sinners, to let them know that they may find grace in his sight on gracious terms, whatsoever their sins have been. His patience is a witness of his tenderness, and readiness to show mercy on terms of grace.

Admire the patience of God. It is matchless and incomparable.

1. Compare it with the patience of the holiest men on earth. Never was there a man like Moses, for meekness, patience, and long-suffering; yet he could not bear with the provocations of the Israelites: when they provoked his meek spirit, "he spake unadvisedly with his lips." O how impatient was he? "Ye rebels," says he, "must we fetch you water out of this rock?" And, in his passion, "he smote the rock twice." Again, though the apostles James and John were good men, yet how ready were they to call for "fire from heaven" upon the Samaritans, because they refused to receive their Lord and Master! A slight affront, in comparison of what he receives from many among us. Mr. Bolton says, if the most tender-hearted man should sit but one hour in the throne of God, and look down on the earth, as God doth continually, and see what abominations are done in that hour, he would undoubtedly, in the next, set all the world on fire.

2. Compare it with the patience of angels. They could not bear with sinners as God doth. When God promised an angel to conduct the children of

Israel into Canaan, and to drive out their enemy and gave this reason why he declined to conduct them immediately by himself, lest their stubbornness should provoke him to destroy them, it is said, that "the people murmured at these evil tidings." What evil tidings were here? They knew, if God could not bear with their provocations, much less could angels; therefore, if a created angel be their guide, they must all perish. Hence it is, that soon as God had proclaimed his name, gracious and long-suffering, Moses falls a-praying, "Let my Lord I pray thee, go amongst us; for it is a stiff-necked people." What an argument was this? Because none but God had the patience to bear with them. As if he had said, Though thou shouldst send the most tender-hearted angel in heaven to conduct them they would be a lost people.

3. Compare it with the patience of the glorified saints. Though their patience be perfect in kind, yet it is not like God's. The souls under the altar are a clear instance of this: they "cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood from them that dwell on the earth?" It is true, here was no sinful impatience; yet a patience infinitely short of the patience of God. The glorified saints are not so able to bear the slow pace of justice against the enemies of the church, as Christ is. If the government of the world had been committed to them, it had been at an end long ere now.

THE MERCY OF GOD.

That we may be engaged to trust in God alone, it is necessary that we believe and consider his mercy well as his power. The power of God alone is no sufficient foundation for trust. Something more

necessary to invite us to a dependence on him, than his bare power and ability to help us. There must be also a firm persuasion of the promptitude and readiness of his will to do what he is able: and this we have in the other attribute of his mercy. Though we are undeserving and ill-deserving creatures, yet he is a merciful God, not only able, but ready to help and succour poor miserable creatures, notwithstanding of their sins. This answers all objections from our sinfulness and unworthiness.

Mercy is the great wonder of the divine nature. Every thing in God is wonderful, but especially his pardoning mercy. It is not so great a wonder that he made the heaven and the earth, and rules the raging sea, and hangs the earth upon nothing; because he is infinite in power: but that he should be merciful to sinners, and infinitely merciful when he is infinitely just; this is the great wonder.

But how can God be most merciful, when he is most just? I answer, justice and mercy, as they are in God, are infinite and equal; but in respect of their exercise there is a difference: for mercy findeth no merit in the creature; but justice is not exercised but when it is deserved. Justice seeks a fit object, mercy only a fit occasion: justice looks to what is deserved, mercy to what is wanted and needed. Again, divine justice and mercy are not opposite to one another: for God never shows mercy contrary to justice, nor executes justice contrary to mercy. His mercy is never exercised unjustly, nor his justice unmercifully. He is righteous without being cruel, and merciful without being unjust. His mercy is righteous, and his justice merciful. He is infinitely just in executing vengeance on those that live and go on in sin, and infinitely merciful in pardoning and saving penitent believing sinners. And his mercy is exercised without prejudice to his justice, because justice hath a full satisfaction in the sufferings of

Christ the surety : so that there is justice in punishing the sin, and mercy in relieving the sinner. The sin punished by justice in the Surety, and pardoned by mercy in the sinner : so that he is just without impairing the honour of his mercy, and merciful without invading the rights of justice.

The nature of divine mercy lies in the promptitude and readiness of the divine will to succour and relieve the miserable. So that when God is called "merciful," or "of great mercy," the plain meaning is, he is of a most forward nature to help and relieve us in our miseries. This is the essential part of mercy.

It is his mercy that sets all his other attributes a-work for our good ; his wisdom to contrive, and his power to effect, what may be for our relief and happiness, and his justice to avenge our quarrels so that all his other attributes are serviceable to his mercy. We are such ill-deserving creatures, that we could expect no good from God, were it not for his infinite mercy.

As divine mercy is exercised freely, so also with delight. God delights in the manifestation of all his attributes, but chiefly in the exercise of his mercy. So it is said, "he delighteth in mercy." Acts of vengeance are not so pleasing to him as acts of mercy. Acts of mercy flow from him freely of his own accord ; but acts of vengeance only when he is provoked ; "for he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." Judgment is his "strange work," and his "strange act." Hence he is called "the Father of mercies." The exercise of his mercy is so pleasant to him, that when it conflicts with justice in the behalf of sinners, and gets the upper hand, he rejoiceth in the victory : "Mercy rejoiceth against judgment."

How comfortable is it, that your covenanted God is a God of infinite mercy ! How vile and unworthy

soever you be in yourselves, yet what may you not expect from infinite mercy? And having this merciful God for your God, you need not be dismayed at any misery. All his thoughts toward you are "thoughts of mercy." All his designs are projects of mercy. All his ways toward you are mercy. If he smile, it is mercy; if he smite, it is mercy. And how comfortable is it, that in all your sorrows, sufferings, and weaknesses, God pities you! It is some relief, in our distresses, to be pitied even by men; how much more to be objects of the divine compassion! It cannot but yield great refreshment unto believers in Christ, that in all their hardships they have the compassionate and merciful God present with them, who hath all power in his hand, to render his compassion effectual for their relief. Under your heaviest afflictions you are in the hands of a merciful Father, who will lay no more on you than he gives strength to bear. Such is his mercy and compassion, that he will not consume you in the furnace, but only try you, and will bring all your trials to a blessed and happy issue. The wounds of mercy are better than the embraces of anger.

Labour to get and entertain large thoughts of the mercy of God. When conscience is awakened, and men see the black and horrid nature of sin, they are apt to bound and limit the mercy of God in their thoughts. Against this that expression is designed as an antidote, "He will have mercy upon him, and he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts," &c. Sinners never err in having too large thoughts of God's mercy, but in seeking and hoping for mercy out of God's way. His mercy is infinite and incomprehensible. Meditate deeply and frequently upon it. Think of the large expressions of the divine mercy in the holy scriptures; and reflect seriously on the ample discoveries God hath given of his mercy in all his works, and more espe-

cially in his dealings with his own people. O do not think of divine mercy with extenuating and diminishing thoughts; but cherish good thoughts of God, and of the largeness and fulness of his mercy, that so you may admire and adore it, and praise him for it. Think of it so as becomes the infiniteness of his nature. Large thoughts of divine mercy will answer all your doubts and fears, when you are under the deep sense of your own vileness and unworthiness.

THE TRUTH OF GOD.

The true God is known by nothing so much as his goodness and truth. This is one remarkable letter in his name, as he himself proclaimed it before Moses, "The Lord God—abundant in goodness and truth." His truth is a precious jewel in his crown. To be a man of truth, a man of his word, is an honourable character. The glory of a man is his credit: so the truth of God is the glory of God. It is a title that God hath joined with his honour as a Creator: as in that of the psalmist, "The Lord, who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that therein is, who keepeth truth for ever." The truth of God is the varnish, splendour, and glory of all his other perfections. He is truly infinite, truly all-sufficient, truly eternal. His goodness is true goodness, his wisdom true wisdom, his holiness true holiness. As sincerity is the beauty of all graces; so truth is the lustre of all the divine perfections.

God cannot be deceived or disappointed in any of his purposes. There is a difference between the purposes and promises of God. His promises are declarations of his purpose. In fulfilling his promises, he is true to the creature; but in accomplishing

his purposes he is true to himself. God is true, and cannot deny his own counsel; for that were to deny himself, and that eternal idea in his own mind. His truth engages his power, wisdom, and other attributes, to act agreeably to his immutable counsel, and the eternal resolutions in his own mind: and herein he cannot possibly fail; for as he can never be at any loss for want of means to execute his purposes, so no created power hath strength enough to be a bar in his way.

The truth and faithfulness of God differ, according to our manner of conceiving. His faithfulness is one branch of his truth, and doth chiefly denote his firmness in keeping promise. Hence it is said, "He is faithful that promised:" and it is said of Sarah, "She judged him faithful who had promised." In this sense especially he is called "the faithful God." Now his faithfulness is incomprehensible; "it reacheth unto the clouds;" and it is greatly admired by the saints even in the darkest times. Hence the church, under the captivity, cries out, "Great is thy faithfulness." It is great, and great unto the heavens; so great that our shallow capacity cannot fathom it.

Let me exhort you especially, who are the children of God, to trust God upon his word. Truth is a great ground of trust; we trust men of truth—and will you not much more trust the God of truth. Trust in him, and depend on him through Christ, for the accomplishment of his promises. Rest and rely upon his truth and faithfulness. In the promises God hath laid his truth in pawn with you, and hath thereby given you a right and claim to the blessings promised; and none that depended on his word were ever disappointed, for "the word of the Lord is tried." Well then, believe the truth of the promises. Let the promises be dear and precious to you, as they were to those ancient worthies, of whom it is

said,-that, having seen the promises afar off, they "were persuaded of them, and embraced them."

Give God the glory of his truth and faithfulness before the world. Glorify him, not only by the quiet and content of your own hearts, but by your carriage before others. You should not only believe, but "set to your seal that God is true." Seal the truth of God as his witnesses, by your joyfulness in all conditions, your patience in afflictions, your diligence in holiness, and your hope in God in the most desperate-like cases. Sanctify God in the eyes of other men; and let the world see that you can venture on the credit of God's word.

GOD'S ETERNITY.

How little do we know of God's eternity! We cannot fully conceive it, much less express it. The most soaring finite understanding cannot have a proportionable knowledge of it. There is no proportion between the longest duration of time and eternity. There are now near six thousand years since the beginning of time; but what are all these years, but as a moment, yea, as nothing, in comparison of eternity? Yea, suppose all angels and men had been constantly employed, each one by himself, from their creation till now, in summing up as many thousands and millions of imaginable years and ages as possibly they could; and suppose a product to be made of all these years and ages; yet all this vast and marvellous arithmetic would amount at most but to a faint shadow of God's eternity. O eternity, eternity! here is neither bank nor bottom. There is no way here but to flee into thy sanctuary, "O the height and the depth!" O who can fathom the depth of eternity! We know that God is eternal; but eternity itself is

too great to be measured by the short line of any created understanding.

How comfortable is it, that this eternal God is your God, yours in all that he is and hath! He is an eternal good and possession to them whose God he is. Earthly enjoyments and comforts are but perishing things, so that they are miserable who have their portion in these: but O, how happy are ye in the enjoyment of him whose "years cannot be searched out!" It is that God who hath neither beginning nor ending, that is your God; and your interest in him abides firm. He is from everlasting to everlasting God; and so long as he is God, he will be your God: "For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death." He is your God, not for a year, or an age; yea, not for millions of years or ages only, but "for ever and ever." Hence it is that he makes over himself to you in the covenant of grace under the notion of the eternal God: "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." He is the eternal God; and so long as he is God, he will be a never-failing spring of joy and peace to your soul. He will be your God while he hath any being; and when all earthly comforts fail you, he will be your abiding portion. "My flesh and my heart faileth," says the psalmist, "but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." Yea, even when you are dead he will be your God still; as he is "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," now some thousands of years after these patriarchs are dead. And he will be your God to all eternity. In heaven you shall fully reap the blessed fruits and advantages of a covenant interest in God. Hence it is said, "And God himself shall be with them, and be their God: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. Then shall you be ever with the Lord." Your happiness in the enjoyment of him

will be eternal. O how comfortable is this! What a blessedness is it to have a saving interest in an eternal God.

Seeing he is the eternal God, let this engage you, who are believers in Christ, to trust in him, and depend on him for the accomplishment of his promises. God's eternity is a great ground of trust. "Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." As his truth, so his power is eternal; they always have been, and will be to eternity, the same: so that what he hath promised he cannot fail to perform. Therefore, when his people despond, as if he had forgotten his promises, or are weary of doing good, he calls them to reflect on what they had heard of his eternity: "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?" His eternity is the assurance of his ability to make good his promises. Men may be sincere in making promises, yet death may soon put them out of all capacity to perform. But God cannot fail of making good his word, because he is "the Eternity of Israel." So it is said, "*The Strength of Israel (Orig. the Eternity of Israel)* will not lie." The psalmist beats us off from trusting in men, because of their frailty and mortality, and infers the happiness of such as trust in God from his eternity: "Put not your trust in princes," says he, "nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God;—who keepeth truth for ever." When men die, their purposes and promises die with them, but God lives for ever. Therefore trust in him, and

depend on him through Christ for the performance of what he hath promised.

It is a great support to faith and hope, to take frequent views of God's eternity. His power, wisdom, goodness, mercy, truth, are matter of comfort to his people ; but what comfort were there in any of these, if he were not eternal? Without eternity, all his other perfections were but as glorious withering flowers.

Is he not worthy of our choicest affection and perpetual love, who is not only lovely in himself, but eternally lovely, and is from everlasting the centre of all excellency and perfection? Indeed he alone is worthy of our love. We lose our love when it is laid out on perishing things : therefore our interest, as well as our duty, obligeth us to set our love on him ; for he is an object that cannot deceive our affection, but will be eternally possessed by all them that love him.

THE GLORY OF GOD.

The excellency, majesty, and glory of any person doth exceedingly heighten the offence committed against him. O then, of what a horrid and heinous nature must sin be, seeing it strikes against the glorious majesty of God, in comparison of whom the whole creation is less than nothing! Hence it is that there is an infinite evil in sin, in regard of the object against whom it is committed, viz. the glorious God. It is a dishonour done to him whose "name alone is excellent." Hence the apostle says, "Through breaking the law, dishonourest thou God!" It is a despising and vilifying him as unworthy to be obeyed or regarded ; a preferring base things and sinful satisfactions, to his favour and communion with him. Sin strikes against the glory

of all his attributes. It is a despising his power, a contempt of his justice, a disparaging his wisdom, a rebelling against his sovereignty, and a disgrace to his holiness, which is the glory of all his attributes. If the glorious God should appear to you, and give you but one glimpse of his excellent glory, you would then entertain other thoughts of sin, and of yourselves for sin, than ever you had formerly. O, how would you loathe yourselves, as base, vile, and unworthy before him! The truth is, it cannot be conceived, much less expressed, what a dishonour sin is to God. And this is that which every gracious soul doth chiefly notice in his sad reflections upon his sin. So did David ; "Against thee," says he, "thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight."

The consideration of the divine glory may comfort believers against the sense of their unworthiness, in their addresses to God. You are sometimes under such a deep sense of your own vileness and unworthiness, that you cannot think to find favour in the eyes of the Lord. But be not discouraged ; for, though you find nothing in yourselves to be a ground of your confidence and hope, yet God finds enough in his own glorious name, as an argument for doing you good, when you come to him through Christ. His great aim, in all the dispensations of his grace, is "the praise of his glory." His design is to manifest and set forth his glory. Therefore he pitches upon such vile and unworthy creatures to be the objects of his grace, that he may be the more glorified. God would not have so much glory, if the poor creatures, to whom he shows favour, were not so vile and unworthy. And sometimes he brings sinners under a deep sense of their own vileness and unworthiness, that the glory of his grace may be the more manifest to them.

The Lord's being the God and Lord of glory, gives

believers ground to expect a glorious and happy state in the world to come. He is our God, and he is the King and Lord of glory, infinitely glorious in himself, and the fountain of all glory. O then, what glory may you expect in the life to come! All that are his, are made like himself: they are "the partakers of the divine nature." He puts a glory upon them, even in this world: They are "glorious within, and perfect through his comeliness, which he puts upon them." But he will put a far greater glory upon them in the world to come. Then you shall find him a Lord of glory; then you shall be like this glorious God, after another manner than you are now. He will then put such a glory upon you, as will be admired by all beholders, "when he shall be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe." Ye who are the children of this glorious God shall, on that day, be clothed in garments of glory; you shall be wholly glorious, in soul and body. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Your bodies shall then be "raised in glory." How beautiful and glorious shall they be, when they shall shine like the sun in its meridian lustre? And your souls shall be apparelled with glory; not the least scar or blot of sin shall be upon them, but the work begun in sanctification, shall then be perfected in glorification.

GOD'S GLORY OUR CHIEF END.

The glory of God is the chief end of our creation and being. It was this God chiefly intended and aimed at in making man. For seeing every rational agent proposeth some end to himself in what he doth; therefore God, being an infinitely wise agent, must have some end in the creation of man; and there being nothing higher or better than his own

glory, he could propose no other end to himself. The end must be more worthy than the means, something higher and better than all created beings, which can be no other than his own glory. Hence it is said, "The Lord hath made all things for himself." And if all things, then man especially, who is the master-piece of the visible creation. Hence it is that God hath given man a soul capable of glorifying him above other creatures. Now, seeing the glory of God was the chief end of our creation and being, and therefore it should be the chief end and scope of our lives,—seeing his glory was the chief end which he proposed to himself in making man, it must needs be the chief end which every man ought to propose to himself.

It is not ambition, nor sinful self-seeking, but the glorious excellency of the divine nature, that God doth all things for himself, for his own glory. Indeed, for men to seek their own glory, is not glory, but rather matter of shame: self-seeking in creatures is monstrous and incongruous. But for God to seek his own glory, is his eminent excellency: it is indeed his glory, because "he is, and there is none else." Now, if the glory of God be his chief end in all his works, why should it not be our chief end in all our works? Certainly, we cannot act more nobly, than by prosecuting according to our capacity, the chief end and purpose of God.

His glory is most excellent. "O Lord our Lord," says the Psalmist, "how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens." And, "His name alone is excellent, his glory is above the earth and heaven." The glory of God transcends the thoughts of men and angels. It is of more worth than heaven, of more value than the salvation of the souls of all men. It is dear to God. He hath bestowed many excellent gifts upon his people, but "his glory he will not give to another."

And if his glory be dear to him, why should it not be dear to us? Man being a rational creature, should act for some end; and here is the most noble and worthy end, the glory of God.

You make self your end in the internal acts of religion, when in your desires after heaven you aim only at your own happiness: when you make this the ultimate end of your desires, this is to respect self more than God. We should aim at the glory of God in our salvation; so that his glory should be our chief and ultimate end. But when you aim only at your own happiness, this is a motion of mere nature. Again, when you desire pardon of sin, only for your security from eternal damnation; and sanctification, only to fit you for everlasting blessedness; and peace of conscience, only that you may live the more comfortably: then you make self your end. I confess, seeing God urgeth us to seek after these blessings, by motives from the great advantages that will redound by them unto ourselves; therefore we may lawfully desire them with respect to ourselves: yet this respect must be contained in its due bounds, in a due subordination to the glory of God, not above it, nor in an equal balance with it. But when in your desires after such spiritual blessings, your thoughts of God's glory and honour are over-tipt by aims at your own advantage; this is to make self your end.

To make the glory of God your chief end will sweeten and facilitate your work amidst all these difficulties and hardships wherewith your duty to God may be attended. It is hard to pinch the flesh, to deny its lustings and cravings, to row against the wind and tide of corrupt nature, and to expose yourselves to many troubles and inconveniences, in the way of duty: but this will make all easy, when you consider that this is the way to glorify God.

We are to glorify God in our conversation by

positive holiness. Hence God saith, "He that offereth praise glorifieth me; and to him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I shew the salvation of God." You glorify God, when you are fruitful in holiness and obedience. "Herein is my Father glorified," says our Lord, "that ye bear much fruit." And the apostle prays, that the Philippians might "be filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and glory of God." You ought to live and walk so as you may in a sort express the glorious perfections of God in your conversation, and that the image of God may be seen stamped on your very lives. "Ye are an holy nation," says the apostle, "a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises (or virtues) of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." We should be as so many clear glasses wherein the glory of God doth evidently shine forth. But, alas, the best of us are but dim glasses; it is but little of God's glory that we shew forth to the world. Your lives should be a constant hymn to the glory and praise of God, by proclaiming to the world a deep sense of the omniscience, infinite justice, and holiness of that God whom you profess to serve. And you should walk so sweetly, both in your general and in your particular callings, as others may be induced to glorify God: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father, who is in heaven."

You glorify God by acts of worship, and a diligent attendance on his ordinances. He hath instituted duties and ordinances for his glory and honour. The worship of God is an homage which we owe to him on the account of his sovereignty. On this ground the psalmist calls for it: "Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God."

You glorify God by walking cheerfully and com-

fortably in the good ways of the Lord. God is dishonoured when such as serve him are dejected in spirit, and give way to despondency and discouragement. The Persian kings would not suffer such to abide in their presence; they thought it a disparagement to them. It is much for the glory of God that you who are his children, walk cheerfully. This brings up a good report on him, and on his way. Hereby you give him the glory of his goodness, and proclaim to the world what a good God and master you serve.

You glorify God by holy Christian contentment in all conditions: and particularly by a cheerful and humble submission to the will of God under afflicting providences, without murmuring or complaining. Hereby you give him the glory of his wisdom, that he knows what is good for you, and how to carve out your lot for you, better than you do yourselves.

Believers in Christ are redeemed from sin and wrath by the price of his own precious blood. Under the law, when a man was bought with another's money, his time, strength, and all he had, belonged to his master; so that his master might freely employ him in any lawful service. Therefore he was called his money. This master might freely use him as his own. But you who are sincere believers in Christ are bought at a far higher rate, even with his own precious blood; and you are redeemed from the worst slavery, even that of sin and Satan: so that you are not your own, but his. Therefore, unless you mean to defraud God of his right, you should mind this more than you do, to live, not to yourselves, but to him that bought you. Especially considering that you were redeemed for this very end, that you might serve God, and live to his glory. Hence it is that believers are said to be redeemed to God: that is, not only to his favour and fellowship, but to his service and obedience. And we read, that

“ Christ died for all, that they who live, might not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them, and rose again : ” and that he “ died that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.”

Whence is it that men are not active in glorifying God ? I assign these causes.

1. Laziness and love of carnal ease. Hence it is that men are loath to be troubled with the faithful performance of their duty. But you can be active and diligent in things of a worldly concern ; and should you not much more be hard at work for God ? Therefore shake off this laziness and ease of the flesh. God is at work for you, and sets all the creatures at work for you ; and should not you be much more at work for him ?

2. A sinful modesty. Some have a modest sense of their own meanness and weakness, and want of gifts and parts, and are ready to cry out, What can I do ? And so they lie by, and do not what they might do and ought to do. But this should not be. When God calls out any of you to be employed for his glory, you should not, like Saul, hide yourselves among the stuff ; nor should you draw back, like Moses, when an opportunity is put in your hand of glorifying God, and doing good in your generation. God can help the stammering tongue, and bless mean gifts, when you sincerely obey his call.

3. Shame : many are ashamed to speak or act for the glory of God ; they cannot endure scoffs, and taunts, and scorns. But as it is true fortitude to despise shame in the cause of God ; so it is an argument of a base spirit, when you cannot endure a disgraceful word for him. Christians should not be ashamed to speak or act for God, before any sort of men in the world. “ I will speak of thy testimonies before kings,” says the psalmist, “ and will not be ashamed.”

4. Fear : some are afraid to put forth themselves

for the glory of God in their place and station, lest they lose the favour of men, and incur their hatred and displeasure. But what is this but to prefer the favour of men to the favour of the great God? Some are brow-beaten with frowns, and cannot venture a little worldly loss, and therefore are afraid to own God and his despised cause and interests. But is this a Christian frame? It is contrary to what the apostle requires: "Strive together for the faith of the gospel; in nothing terrified by your adversaries."

Many formal professors make a fair show of glorifying God, but do it not sincerely. They do that which for the matter tends to his glory, they speak and act for his cause and interests, but without any intention of glorifying him: their end is, to get a name to themselves, or to advance themselves, and promote their own interests. Jehu made a show of "zeal for the Lord;" but it was indeed a zeal for himself and his own interests. Some are publicly active in promoting the interests of religion, but are really hunting after their own interests; therefore they are no longer active that way, than they can carry their own interests along with it.

5. Alas, even the children of God are not so active and forward in glorifying God as they ought to be. What cause have even the best among us to lament, that we have come so far short of what we ought to have done, and might have done, for advancing the glory of his blessed name? Alas, that God hath so little glory by us. Some of you who are truly gracious would have God glorified, but you do not lay out yourselves this way as it becomes you.

It is most honourable employment to glorify God. It is God's own work: he glorifies himself; and as it is the work of angels and glorified saints: so it is admirable condescension that he should call vile sinful dust to be employed herein, and that he hath put you in some capacity for such work, and that you have

so many advantages and opportunities put into your hand for this end. Admire his condescension, and let the consideration thereof gain upon your hearts.

This is all he seeks, and all we can give, for all his mercies and blessings. It is God's bargain, "I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." This is all his rent and revenue. When you consider the great things God hath done for you; when you think on your glorious privileges, the great blessings you enjoy, and all your gracious receipts; your hearts should and will be ready to cry out, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me." Now, you can render nothing to God as a valuable recompense for his favours and blessings. But this is all he seeks, and all that you can give, and that which he will be well satisfied with, that you glorify him. He lets out to you all the blessings you enjoy for the rent of glory.

Resign and give yourselves to God to be his, and to serve him, and live to him. "Yield yourselves unto God." You must cordially own his right to you and power over you. Give your hearty consent to be his. None can lay such claim to you as God can do; you can never serve a better Master; and you are never more your own than when given up to him. Therefore resign yourselves to him deliberately, and to his whole will in all things. Resign yourselves to him wholly, soul and body, to be wholly and for ever his.

Study much self-denial. Many are discouraged in acting for the glory of God in their place, by incumbrances, inconveniences, and worldly losses they are put to, and scoffs and scorns they meet with. Therefore study to be denied to your own ease, credit, and profit, and all your own interests. Lay all down at God's feet. Count nothing too dear to you, so you may be instrumental in promoting the glory of God.

GOD'S BLESSEDNESS.

God's blessedness in himself, is that attribute, whereby, being for ever free from all evil, and having all fulness of perfection and sufficiency in himself, he doth most perfectly and unchangeably enjoy himself.

He hath all fulness of perfection and sufficiency in himself. For, he is an infinitely and absolutely perfect being. "Your Father who is in heaven is perfect," says Christ. "He is perfect in knowledge:" and so also in his power, wisdom, mercy, goodness, and other attributes. He is God all-sufficient, as that word may be rendered. He is sufficient of himself to his own happiness. So that there is no want of any thing in him; nor doth he need any thing from us: "seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." We need one another; the greatest stand in need of the meanest; the meanest members have their use in the body: but he hath no need of us. He neither needs nor desires the creature, nor any thing from the creature, as if any benefit could redound to him thereby.

The whole world cannot add anything to his blessedness; for, he hath enough in himself, and was sufficient to his own happiness, before the world was made, so that he created the world, not that he might be happy, but that he might be liberal. He requires obedience and service from us, not for any good or advantage to himself, but for our own good and happiness. And he useth means and instruments in his works, both of nature and grace; not out of necessity, as if he needed them, but out of his abundant goodness, that he may impart the dignity of a kind of efficiency to his creatures.

God is objectively blessed; as he is the object

of our blessedness. He is so blessed that the enjoyment of him makes us blessed. And a greater blessedness than this there cannot be. "Blessed is that people whose God is the Lord." Seeing he is an infinitely blessed Being, what happiness can there be comparable to this, to enjoy him? He is an all-sufficient Being, sufficient of himself to his own blessedness and happiness, much more to ours; so that it is the height of happiness to enjoy him. Now believers enjoy him in part, even in this world. God hath promised this to them, even his gracious presence, access to and communion with him. And it is this that the saints long for, as the Psalmist did: "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks," says he, "so panteth my soul after thee, O God; my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God;" and, "My soul thirsteth for thee, to see thy power, and thy glory." And the saints do sometimes enjoy him in such a measure and manner, that they are apt to cry out with the Psalmist, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." But in heaven they shall enjoy him fully. There they shall have the highest enjoyment of God that their capacity can admit of, when they shall be filled with all the fulness of God, and he will communicate himself to them in the utmost latitude they are capable of.

It follows from this doctrine, that atheists are, of all men in the world, the greatest enemies to mankind; seeing they cut off from men all hopes of blessedness and happiness, by taking away the spring and fountain of it. For, if there is not a God, how can any man be blessed and happy in the enjoyment of him? And other happiness there is none; for unless we suppose that God is, we cannot possibly frame any true idea of happiness. All the enjoyments and comforts in the world are not so necessary to our happiness as God is: Without him, there can

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be none; and without them, he alone is sufficient. So that in nothing can a man shew himself a greater enemy to mankind, than by endeavouring to banish the belief of a God out of the world. That is true of the atheist, "His hand is against every man;" therefore every man's hand should be against him, in so far as he is such. Further, the atheist is the greatest enemy to himself. He that wishes there were no God, cannot wish worse to himself: So that he that "says in his heart there is no God," must be a *fool* indeed. Seeing there is no happiness but in the enjoyment of God, no man can shew himself a greater enemy to himself and his own happiness, than by endeavouring to raze the impressions of the being of a Deity out of his mind.

This doctrine discovers to us wherein it is that we should seek our blessedness and happiness, and wherein it consists: Not in earthly enjoyments and comforts, but in the enjoyment of the blessed God: He only is the object of our blessedness. He is the alone all-sufficient Being: So that it is the enjoyment of him alone that can make us happy.

But here it may be enquired, What is it to enjoy God? It implies these things, 1. A saving interest in God as our God in Christ. That which we enjoy is our own. And indeed we cannot be blessed but in what is our own. Hence the psalmist says, "God even our own God, shall bless us: blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." 2. A saving union with God through Christ. Hence believers are said to "dwell in God," and he in them. This is a glorious mystery, and shall never be fully understood till we come to heaven. "At that day," says our Lord, "ye shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." 3. Familiar communion and fellowship with God: for "truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." When God manifests and communicates himself to the soul in a

gracious way, then we enjoy him. Of this our Lord speaks: "I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." 4. The saving knowledge of God, his perfection, fulness, and all-sufficiency: when God gives us "an heart to know him; and shineth into our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." We cannot be said to enjoy that whereof we have no knowledge: so, we do not enjoy God, unless we have some knowledge of his excellency and all-sufficiency, that so we may see our own happiness and blessedness in the enjoyment of him. 5. Complacency and delight in God. We do not enjoy that wherein we do not joy. He that enjoys God takes pleasure and delight in him. This the psalmist requires, "Delight thyself also in the Lord:" And the spouse tells us, that she "sat down under his shadow with great delight. 6. The soul's acquiescing and resting in God as its chief good. The man sees himself happy in God: therefore he rests here; now he would change no more. He seeks after no object to make up his happiness, but is ready to cry out with the psalmist, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places:" and, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon the earth that I desire beside thee."

Is he the blessed God, the fountain of blessedness? Then go to him for all needful blessings. In this, imitate the example of Jabez: "Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed," says he. The words express a vehement wish and desire. His heart was much set upon this, to have God's blessing. In the original text the words are expressed in the form of a vow; "If thou wouldest in blessing bless me." If thou wouldest do so, then I would—What wouldest thou do? O what would I not do, or suffer, or part with, to have thy blessing! If thou wouldest bless me, then I would be thine, and love, and fear, and serve thee.

Remember, you have to do with an infinitely blessed God, who delights to communicate of his blessedness. It is a part of his blessedness to be still giving out blessings. And he is more ready to bless than to curse. He doth not curse, but when it is, as it were, extorted from him: but he blesseth freely, without any merit or desert on our part. God's great end in sending Christ was, that he might bless poor sinners; as the apostle Peter declares to his hearers, "God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you." In the days of Christ's flesh, we never read that he formally cursed any man, but he was much in blessing. He began blessing, in his excellent sermon upon the Mount: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are they that mourn," &c. And he went on blessing: "Yea, rather," says he, "blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it: And he took *little children* up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them." And he died blessing: he prayed on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And he went off the world blessing: "he led *his disciples* out as far as to Bethany, and lifted up his hands and blessed them." And never any that came to him for a blessing, was sent away without it; and he hath pledged his word that never any shall: "him that cometh to me," says he, "I will in no ways cast out." Seriousness and earnestness in seeking to God for these blessings, is the sure way to obtain them; for he hath not "said unto the seed of Jacob, seek ye me in vain;" but "it is good to the soul that seeketh him." And others have prevailed, and have gotten the blessing, as Jacob and Jabez.

THE END.

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